

THEOLOGICAL SKETCH-BOOK,

OR

SKELETONS OF SERMONS;

CAREFULLY ARRANGED IN SYSTEMATIC ORDER SO AS TO
CONSTITUTE A COMPLETE

BODY OF DIVINITY;

PARTLY ORIGINAL BUT CHIEFLY SELECTED FROM

Simcon's *Horæ Homileticæ* and *Skeletons*; *Sketches of Sermons*; *Pulpit Assistant*;
Benson's *Plans*; *Preacher*; *Pulpit*, and other approved publications.

DESIGNED FOR THE USE OF STUDENTS OF DIVINITY, MINISTERS
OF THE GOSPEL AND PRIVATE CHRISTIANS.

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CHAPTER I.

THE MEANS OF GRACE.

CONTINUED FROM VOLUME FIRST.

NEED OF DIVINE ASSISTANCE IN PRAYER.

Romans viii. 29.—Likewise the Spirit also helpeth our infirmities: for we know not what we should pray for as we ought: but the Spirit itself maketh intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered. (Pr.)

PRAYER has been the distinguishing practice of the godly in all ages, and no real believer can live without it. Yet for this, as well as for all other spiritual duties, we are insufficient, and need the Holy Spirit to teach and help us. Yea, more than in any other duty, as it is of all others the most spiritual, and therefore the most difficult to be performed aright. There is no nearness to God in this exercise, without a considerable degree of spirituality, and abstraction from the present world.

I. CONSIDER OUR INSUFFICIENCY FOR THIS GREAT DUTY: “WE KNOW NOT WHAT WE SHOULD PRAY FOR AS WE OUGHT.

It is intimated that we are insufficient in two respects, both as to the matter and manner of prayer.

1. As to the *matter of prayer*: “we know not *what* to pray for.”—— We know some things that we want, and should ask for; but on the whole we are exceedingly ignorant and uninformed.

Particularly, *we are apt to pray for many things which if granted would be for our hurt*: and “who knoweth what is good for man in this life?” We may think uninterrupted health and prosperity would be desirable: yet afflictions are often amongst our greatest blessings, and continued prosperity might have been our ruin.—— We may think it good that the life of our children and friends should be spared; yet we know not what they would be to us, if our desire were granted. Paul had a thorn in the flesh which he wished to have removed, but the Lord saw it needful to be there.—— We may desire a station in the church, which we are not qualified to occupy; like the two disciples who wanted to sit, one on the right hand and the other on the left, in the kingdom of their Lord; but were told “they knew not what they asked.”—— In all such cases our feelings and wishes must be subordinated to the will of God, saying with our blessed Lord, Not my will, but thine be done. We may ask as he did, to have the bitter cup removed; but we must also submit as he did.

Again: *We omit praying for many things which are essential to our good.* It is well that God's giving is not measured by our asking, and that he gives exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think, Ephes. iii. 20.

—— We know not the difficulties that lie before us, and therefore cannot ask specifically for what is necessary. David saw none of these when he was anointed king, nor what troubles would attend his reign. If Peter had been duly aware of the temptation that would befall him, he might have prayed against that fatal hour: but it was well that Christ foresaw it, and

prayed for him that his faith might not fail. — Every day of our lives we know not what to ask in particular, and can only commit our way unto the Lord, that our goings may be established.

2. As to the manner of praying: “we know not what we should pray for as we ought.” — Even in those things which we know we ought to pray for, we know not how to ask aright, or in a proper manner. There are some things which we know we need, as our daily bread, the forgiveness of our sins, and to be kept from temptation: yet we know not how to pray for them in such a manner as is required. — It is intimated in the text that there is something belonging to the manner of true prayer, which is necessary to render it acceptable in the sight of God; and that those who draw near to him are required to pray “as they ought.” This may include the following particulars—

1. That *our hearts be fixed*, and engaged with God in this sacred duty. It must be the prayer of faith, pleading the promises, and relying on their fulfilment. — But how difficult it is to have our hearts thus engaged, thus intently fixed on the great object of prayer: how prone to turn aside like a deceitful bow!

2. That we approach God *with humility and deep abasement*. The gospel has placed us on low ground, and there we must stand whenever we appear before God; as sinners ready to perish, as utterly unworthy, crying out with the publican, God be merciful to me a sinner. The Pharisee prayed, but knew not how to pray as he ought, and it availed nothing. — See the case of the poor woman, who did pray as she ought. Matt. xv. 22—28. It is such importunate prayer that takes the kingdom of heaven by violence.

3. That *our expectations from God should be enlarged*. To pray “as we ought,” we must desire much and hope for much. We must believe in God’s truth and goodness, in Christ’s sufficiency and willingness to save. “Open thy mouth wide, and I will fill it.” We must pray always, and not faint; and then like Jacob we shall prevail. — This however is the manner of prayer for which we feel our insufficiency, and need the influence of the Holy Spirit. We find it difficult, as Job did, to order our speech aright before him, by reason of darkness; but if we possess the spirit of faith, we shall prevail notwithstanding.

4. That we *urge those pleas which God delights to honor*. What these are we may see in some examples of successful prayer, and shall find that they were all derived from the honor and glory of God, his covenant faithfulness and truth, and the prevailing name of the Lord Jesus. — When Moses pleaded for Israel, he pleaded the name and the faithfulness of God. Exod. xxxii. 10—14. — When Solomon asked great things for Israel, and that God would forgive his people, his plea is the covenant promise which he had given. 1 Kings viii. 25, 30, 39. — Hezekiah did the same, and also the apostles of our Lord, Isa. xxxvii. 14; Acts iv. 30.

II. OBSERVE HOW MUCH WE ARE INDEBTED TO THE ASSISTANCE OF THE HOLY SPIRIT, IN THE PERFORMANCE OF THIS IMPORTANT DUTY.

He is said to “help our infirmities,” and to “make intercession for us.” Without his influence there is no true prayer: we must pray with the Spirit and with the understanding also. — Saul had been in the habit of prayer while a pharisee; yet when he was converted it was said, “Behold he prayeth,” for he had never truly prayed before. — The inhabitants of Jerusalem were no doubt accustomed to attend the worship of the sanctuary; yet it was not till the Holy Spirit was poured out upon them that they began

to pray in real earnest. Zech. xii. 10. — Nor do believers ever prevail in prayer and supplication, but by his assistance. Such are their “infirmities,” their ignorance, weakness, and wanderings of heart.

The “intercession” of the Holy Spirit, is not like that of Christ’s: the latter is for us, but this is in us. It is the Holy Spirit that inspires us with a spirit of prayer, and it is he that teaches us both how and what to pray for as we ought. — He never excites desires, but such as are according to the will of God. The Lord also is said to know the mind of the Spirit, or what is of his inditing; and knowing this, he will assuredly answer. — It is the Holy Spirit that endues the mind with sacred fervor and earnestness, and furnishes it with sweetness of expression in prayer. When the mind is overwhelmed with grief and anguish, and unable to give utterance to the heart, he interprets “the groans that cannot be uttered, and maketh intercession for us.”

IMPROVEMENT.

1. We are taught to acknowledge our utter insufficiency for what is good, and that the whole of our salvation is of grace. We can do nothing as we ought, and therefore nothing to deserve mercy at the hands of God.

2. While we feel and own our insufficiency, let us not presume to deny our obligations; for we are not only at the same time to pray, but required to pray as we ought.

3. We are from hence furnished with a criterion by which to judge of our own religion; for it is here taken for granted that the Lord’s people are a praying people, and that they account it good to draw near unto God.

4. We are here taught to cherish the influence of the Holy Spirit, to depend upon it in the performance of every spiritual exercise, and to admire the infinite compassion of God the Holy Spirit to our manifold infirmities.

PRAYER PROVED TO BE A PROFITABLE EXERCISE.

Job xxi, 15.—“What profit should we have, if we pray unto him.” (Sk.)

“I AM the man that hath seen affliction,” said Jeremiah; and with equal propriety might Job have adopted similar language. What affliction did he see in his family; in his substance; and in his person! and how afflictive were the ill-natured and sarcastic reflections attached to his character by his mistaken friends! they were puzzled to understand, why God had thus dealt with Job. As his afflictions were so sudden, so complicated, and so overwhelming they thought that some secret thing, some hidden wickedness, had drawn down the heavy judgments of God upon him. But Job confutes their unfounded assertions, and vindicates his own character, by showing, that this world, though the theatre of crime, is not the scene of punishment. “Wherefore doth the wicked live?” &c. verse 7. Why does not God punish them? They are not afflicted—neither in their persons, “The rod of God,” &c. verse 9. Nor in their families, “Their seed is established,” &c. verse 8. Nor in their property, “Their bull gendereth,” &c. verse 10. Nor have they any inward depression of spirits, “for they take the timbrel and harp,” &c. verse 12. But this prosperity could not be the result of in-

nocence on their part, or of approbation on the part of God. For "they say unto God, Depart from us," &c. "What is the Almighty that we should serve him, and what profit?" &c. That is, there is nothing in God to excite our homage, nor is there any thing in prayer to promote our welfare. Thus the sentiment in the text is as false as it is impious. But let us try to profit by this passage, while we consider,

I. THE EXERCISE ASSUMED—"If we pray unto him."

II. THE INQUIRY INSTITUTED—"What profit should we have?"

I. THE EXERCISE ASSUMED—"If we pray," &c. Prayer implies four things:

1. *A consciousness of want.* Man is a needy creature. He wants every thing! nothing is absolutely his own. Destitution is his inheritance; if God abandon him, he has nothing, and is nothing. He wants earthly blessings to support his body, and heavenly blessings to sustain and satisfy his mind. But many never pray, because they know not their necessities: they are ignorant of themselves, of their poverty, guilt and wretchedness. They are best qualified to pray who know most of themselves.

2. *Prayer supposes an object capable of supplying our wants.* This Being must know our necessities, and possess sufficient benevolence and power to supply them. Such is the Almighty, who is considered in this verse as the object of prayer. He knows us altogether, and his benevolence is equal to his knowledge, and his name is sufficiently indicative of his power to do us good. Prayers to saints or angels are impious, as they transfer the homage from the creator to the creature; and absurd, as angels are as dependant as men.

3. *Prayer implies an approach towards the Almighty.* Man is an alien from God; far gone from original righteousness. God is not in all his thoughts. The lusts of the flesh, the lusts of the eye, and the pride of life, absorb his whole attention. But when he begins to pray, his mind turns towards God. Hence prayer is called feeling after God, looking to him, seeking his face, and pouring out the heart before him.

4. *Prayer includes an expression of our wants.* They who pray speak to God: "Behold now I have taken upon me to speak unto the Lord," &c. Gen. xviii. 27. "While I was speaking in prayer," &c. Hannah spake in her heart, when she prayed, but her voice was not heard, 1 Sam. i. 13. "When ye pray, say, Our Father," &c. "Take with you words, and turn unto the Lord," Hosea xiv. 2. Let us express our wants *fully*; let us not dissemble nor cloak our sins before the face of Almighty God; but confess them in all their variety, their malignity, and demerit. Let us do it *humbly*. God is an awful being; we are not worthy of the least of his mercies. Pride is hateful to God; but "he shall save the humble person." Let us do it *importunately*: God suffers us to plead with him, Luke xi. 5—10. xvii. 1—7. Do it by *faith*; and especially do it in *the name of Jesus*, John xiv. 13, 14.

II. THE INQUIRY INSTITUTED. "What profit should we have?" &c. Selfishness is universally prevalent in the world. Wicked men are invariably selfish men; "All seek their own, not the things which are Jesus Christ's." Hence the inquiry concerning profit in the text; and because prayer is deemed unprofitable, therefore it is neglected. But there is no exercise under heaven attended with so much profit as prayer.

1. *Prayer contributes to the removal of evil. Of moral evil.* Jabez prayed that God would keep him from evil; and God granted him that which he requested. David said, "I will confess my transgressions unto the Lord,

and thou forgavest the iniquity of my sin. *Of natural evil.—Affliction.* “Is any among you afflicted? let him pray.” “Then they cried unto the LORD in their trouble, and he delivered them,” &c. *Psa. cvii. 6.* Hezekiah prayed, and wept in his affliction, and God said, “Behold I will heal thee.” *1 Kings xx. 5.—Sorrow.* “I found,” said David, “trouble and sorrow: then called I upon the name of the LORD,” &c. *Psa. cxvi. 1—4.* Christ “offered up prayers and supplications, with strong crying and tears, unto him that was able to save him from death, and was heard in that he feared.” —*Oppression.* Look at Israel in Egypt, “I have heard their cry,” saith God, “by reason of their task masters, and am come down to deliver them,” *Exod. iii. 7, 8.* See Peter shut up in prison; but prayer was made for him, and God delivered him, *Acts xii, 5—16, 25.*

2. *Prayer is instrumental in procuring good.* All good, for body and soul, for time and eternity, is promised to prayer. *Is it profitable to possess wisdom?* Yes, “if thou be wise, thou shalt be wise for thyself.” Wisdom procures happiness, *Prov. iii. 13.* Length of days, *iii. 16.* Pleasures, verse 17. Promotion, *Prov. iv. 8.* And glory, *iii. 35, iv. 9.* But he who never prays is devoid of wisdom. See *1 Kings iii. 9; Dan. ii. 18, 23; James i. 5; Acts x. 31.* *Is it profitable to possess power?* Power to resist the devil, to conquer our corruptions, and to vanquish and put to flight the armies of the aliens? Prayer supplies this strength. “In the day when I cried, thou answeredst me, and strengthenedst me with strength in my soul,” *Psa. cxxxviii. 3.* The spirit helpeth our infirmities, but they who pray most acceptably to God have the largest effusions of that spirit, *Luke xi. 13.* Prayer is a most important part of the Christians’ armour. *Is it profitable to possess protection?* See *Psa. xviii. 3, lvi. 9.* To possess peace? *Phil. iv. 6, 7.* To have an assurance of heaven? See the penitent thief, *Luke xxiii. 42, 43.* And the profit of prayer infinitely outweighs all other profit.—It is *divine.* Worldly profit consists in flocks, herds, money, &c. This, in faith, grace, love, happiness, &c.—It is *mental.* Worldly profit is sensual, all for the outward man; but he who prays is enriched inwardly; all his intellectual powers are profited.—It is *comprehensive.* Worldly profit is circumscribed, and bounded by time; the profit of prayer illimitable.—It is *universal.* Worldly profit affects us partially; this, in body, and soul, and substance. And the profit arising from prayer is secured without risk, and retained without any fears of deprivation. In conclusion observe,

1. *The conduct of the wicked is impious.* They not only live without prayer, but live as if God had no right to exact this duty of them. “What profit should we have, if we pray?”—But is it optional with you whether to pray or not? Are duties matters of opinion? No, God has made prayer imperative upon you; it is his commandment, and it cannot be violated with impunity.

2. *The conduct of the wicked is erroneous.* They consider prayer a profitless exercise, and therefore neglect it. But this calculation is totally unfounded. Prayer avails much. How strange that men who reason so conclusively in matters of science, should suffer themselves to be so grievously deceived as to the duties of religion!

3. *The conduct of the wicked is ruinous.* Without prayer salvation is unattainable, *Prov. i. 24—31.*

THE APOSTLE'S PRAYER FOR AN INCREASE OF FAITH.

Luke xvii. 5.—And the apostles said unto the Lord, Increase our faith. (Sk.)

IN the verses preceding the text, our divine Redeemer instructs his disciples in the nature and importance of a most difficult duty, that of forgiving injuries; a duty totally unknown or utterly disregarded, till taught by his doctrines, and enforced by his example; as the wisest moralists of the most enlightened nations represented the desire of revenge as the mark of a noble mind, and thought it more magnanimous to revenge an injury, than forgive it. "If thy brother trespass against thee," &c. ver. 3. "Offences will come:" our views are dissimilar, our passions discordant, and our interests diversified; some offend by their dispositions—others by their manners—others by their conduct; some by their ignorance, and others by their wickedness; but whatever motive may actuate the offending person, or however frequently he may repeat the offence, yet, if he repent, "thou shalt forgive him." The apostles seemed aware of the difficulty attendant on the practice of this duty, and therefore said unto the Lord, "Increase our faith." In the text there are four general ideas implied.

I. THAT THE DISCIPLES OF CHRIST POSSESS FAITH. There can be no *increase* where there is no possession. We may infer the truth of the above assertion,

1. *From the nature of faith.* Definitions of faith are abundant; genuine faith implies the entertaining Scriptural views of the person and offices of Christ, accompanied by an implicit dependence on him for salvation, and a cordial reception of him in the heart. And if this view of faith be correct, it can exist only among the disciples of Christ. Infidels deny his existence—Arians and Socinians reject his atonement—Pharisees trust in themselves that they are righteous, and are ignorant of Christ's righteousness—and practical sinners of all kinds refuse to admit him into their hearts.

2. *From the character of Christ's disciples.* As disciples they are all instructed by him. In what?—the doctrines of faith. What do they learn?—to believe in his name, to submit to his authority, and to depend upon his truth. As disciples they follow him; does not this suppose the exercise of faith? Acts xiii. 38, 'They rejoice in him, Luke xix. 37. But their joy is the joy of faith, 1 Pet. i. 8.

3. *From the testimonies of revelation.* Jesus said to one, "O woman, great is thy faith!" To another, "Thy faith hath saved thee." He prayed for Peter, that his "faith fail not." Stephen was "a man full of faith," &c.

II. THAT AN INCREASE OF FAITH IS POSSIBLE. This will appear,

1. *From the power and goodness of its Author.* Faith is not an earthly virtue, begotten by the mere exercise of the human faculties, but a grace that owes its existence to the agency of Jesus Christ. He is "the author and finisher of our faith," &c. Heb. xii. 2; Eph. ii. 8; Phil. i. 29. And cannot he who bestows the gift, increase that gift? He who opens the eye of the mind to behold the glories of eternity, can shine with clearer light, and beam with greater lustre. His power is infinite, and his goodness unlimited.

2. *From the progressive nature of religion.* Religion is all progression, and every christian grace admits of an increase; its first implantation in the heart resembles a seed, which when cast into the earth germinates, and, by progressive and gradual growth, becomes a great tree. Christians are regarded as walking, running, pressing forward, all of which expressions de-

note increase and advancement. Religion must not be considered in detached parts, but as a complete system of holy principles, and heavenly fruits, which have a necessary dependence upon each other; and our increase in one, necessarily ensures an increase in the whole.

3. *From the admonitions of the Bible.* Christians are exhorted to "grow in grace," &c. 2 Pet. iii. 18. Earnestly to contend for the faith, &c. Jude 3. To build yourselves up, &c. ver. 20. These with many other texts in the New Testament, prove that an increase of faith is possible.

4. *From the experience of the saints.* Faith increases by exercise: every act of faith tends to give permanency and stability to the principle which gives it birth. Christians depend upon God for providential, spiritual, and eternal benefits; and that dependence increases in proportion as they know more of God, Psa. ix. 10.

III. THAT AN INCREASE OF FAITH IS GREATLY TO BE DESIRED. We infer this,

1. *From its nature.* It is a divine gift, and its existence is attributed to the operation of God, Col. ii. 12. That which God works in us must be desirable: as he is an infinitely good being, his works must necessarily bear a resemblance to himself.

2. *From its effects.* These refer—*To our own personal salvation.* We are justified by faith—saved by faith—Christ dwells in our hearts by faith—we stand by faith—live by faith—walk by faith—and have boldness of access to God by faith. *To the victories we gain over our enemies.* By the shield of faith we quench the fiery darts, &c. Eph. vi. 16. We conquer the world by faith, 1 John v. 4. The ancient worthies by faith "subdued kingdoms," &c. Heb. xi. 33, 34.—*To the moral influence of our example.* True faith produceth good works; for "faith without works is dead;" and good works are profitable unto men, Matt. v. 16; Titus iii. 8. That on which such high encomiums are bestowed in the bible, by which such amazing effects have been produced, and the absence of which involves men in condemnation here and eternal damnation hereafter, must be desirable. And as the most certain way of retaining faith, is by increasing in it, we may infer the truth of the above position.

IV. THAT MEANS SHOULD BE USED TO SECURE AN INCREASE OF FAITH. To accomplish this object,

1. *Study the character of its author.* Meditate on the power, wisdom, and goodness of our Lord Jesus Christ. Reflect on what he has done for mankind; contemplate what he has promised to do. Think meanly of the Saviour, and you will have little confidence in him; but think greatly and highly of him, and you will trust in him heartily, and believe in him fully.

2. *Get a more extensive acquaintance with the promises of God.* Read them frequently; treasure them up in your memories; hide them in your hearts; meditate on their greatness, variety and immutability; and labor to realize them in your own personal experience.

3. *Be on your guard against every thing that will deaden or damp the ardour of your faith.* Carnal company, worldly cares, spiritual supineness, filthy and foolish conversation,—all tend to sap the foundation of your faith, and destroy your dependence upon God. Chiefly,

4. *Pray for an increase of faith.* "The apostles said unto the Lord, increase our faith;"—"Go thou, and do likewise." Say it *humbly*, from a deep conviction of thy unworthiness, and the infinite dignity and goodness of thy Saviour;—say it *fervently*; pour out strong cries and fervent supplications in behalf of this blessing;—say it *importunately*; recollect the im-

portunate widow, and the poor blind beggar;—say it in thy closet;—say it in the assemblies of the saints;—say it as thou walkest by the way;—say it for thy own sake, and for the sake of others.

In conclusion, we address a word,

1. *To those who have no faith.* Your case is awful, you are condemned already, and the wrath of God abideth on you. You need say unto the Lord, Give us faith, impart the heavenly gift to us, and let us believe to the saving of our souls.

2. *To those whose faith has declined.* “Remember from whence you are fallen, and repent, and do your first works.”

3. *To those whose faith remains in full vigour.* “Hold fast whereto ye have already attained, and walk by the same rule,” &c. Keep faith in lively exercise, and soon you will receive the end of your faith, even the salvation of your souls.

THE DEBTOR'S PRAYER.

Matthew vi. 10.—Forgive us our debts. (Sk.)

THIS petition is taken from that comprehensive and well known compendium of devotion, which we call, for the sake of distinction, the Lord's prayer. A prayer which Christ condescended to teach his disciples; and a prayer which is designed to be a model for all our prayers. Forms of prayer were common among the Jews, and every public teacher presented one to his disciples; these forms were sometimes drawn out to a considerable length, and from them abridgments were not unfrequently made. We have the satisfaction to learn from God himself what prayer is, and what language we should use in our addresses to the throne of grace; and when a sovereign dictates a petition which he allows condemned culprits to present to him, who can question his willingness to grant their request?—The text is of universal consequence, and suggests to us;—that we have debts,—that these debts may be forgiven,—and that it is highly important and desirable for us to obtain forgiveness.

I. WHAT ARE OUR DEBTS? This term *debts*, is by St. Luke xi. 4, rendered *sins*. St. John defines sin as a transgression of the law; of that particular law which every man is under to God. Jesus Christ has seen fit to reduce the whole of the moral law, which in the Old Testament is amplified into various precepts, into two positive injunctions. “Thou shalt love the Lord thy God,” &c., Matt. xxii. 37—39. God's law is *universally binding*; wherever there are rational creatures in any part of the creation, there they are obligated to love God according to the extent of their capacities.—*It can never be abrogated.* Human laws change, worldly maxims vary, and many of the Jewish precepts were designed only for a single people and to be in use for a certain period, but this law is unchangeable. *It allows of no deviation.* It requires perfect, uniform, and undeviating obedience; and every man, through all the periods of his being, with an unchangeable intensity of desire, is required to love God, &c. This law we have all violated in instances innumerable.—We have done it, by omitting to do what the law positively enjoins; and by doing what the law plainly prohibits.—These deviations, sins, or trespasses, are in the text termed *debts*.

1. *Debts suppose two parties, the one of which has received goods, valuables, or commodities from the other.* This is our case. From God we have received all we possess; we owe our being to him, Acts xvii. 25—28. Our bodies are his workmanship, Psal. cxxxix. 13—16. He is the father of our spirits, Heb. xii. 9. For our property we are indebted to his blessing, Deut. viii. 18. He fixeth the bounds of our habitation, Acts xvii. 27. Indeed to each of us it may be said, “What hast thou that thou didst not receive?”

2. *Debts imply, that the returns made have not been proportioned to the property received.* Here also we all stand impeached. How deeply are we in arrears! Unnumbered benefits we have received from God, but what returns have we made? It is said of Hezekiah, “that he rendered not again according to the benefit done unto him:” and his conduct we have all too successfully imitated. Our time has been wasted,—our talents prostituted,—our hearts set on idols.—The members of our bodies have been instruments of unrighteous unto sin; and the powers of our souls have been darkened and degraded: and God and his benefits forgotten.

3. *Debts place their subjects in circumstances of embarrassment and danger.* How wretched is the man who is deeply in debt! Wherever he turns, he is sure to meet a creditor. who harasses and torments him for sums which he is totally unable to discharge. He lives every day under the expectation of an arrest, and calculates upon nothing but confinement in a jail. How descriptive is this of the state of sinners who are deeply in debt to God! who have made no returns of gratitude, love, nor obedience to their Maker! who are tormented with fearful apprehensions! liable to an arrest from Divine Justice, and in danger of being cast into the prison of hell.

II. OUR DEBTS MAY BE FORGIVEN.

1. *When we ask forgiveness for our debts, it supposes that we have no hope of discharging them.* We cannot pay them off: the immense and incalculable value of the benefits received, leaves no possibility of our making adequate returns for them: if God had never done any thing for us, but that of giving his Son to die for our sins, this would have laid us under such a mighty debt of obligation, that an eternity of gratitude would have failed to discharge the amazing sum; but he has given us his Spirit, his gospel, his ordinances, and his ministers. “Oh to grace what mighty debtors!” We cannot pay off our debts; they have been so long standing, accumulating, and increasing. Most of all, we have nothing to pay, we are insolvent debtors.

2. *When we ask forgiveness, it implies that our future obedience can never atone for our past defects.* If we had contracted a debt, our payment for goods in future would not discharge the old debt: we can never go beyond the requirements of the law; “Therefore by the deeds of the law,” &c., Rom. iii. 20. But our debts may be forgiven. We infer this,—*First, from the character of God as revealed by himself.* He proclaimed his name to Moses; “The Lord God, merciful and gracious, long-suffering, and abundant in goodness and truth; keeping mercy for thousands; forgiving iniquity,” &c., Exod. xxxiv. 6, 7. “He is ready to pardon,” Neh. ix. 7. “Ready to forgive,” Psal. lxxxvi. 5. “To him belong mercies and forgivenesses,” &c., Dan. ix. 9. “I, even I, am he that blotteth out,” &c., Isa. xliii. 25.—*Secondly, from the atoning sacrifice of Jesus Christ.* That the sufferings of the Redeemer were sufferings for our sins, is a fact which the inspired writers most clearly demonstrate. “He was wounded for our transgressions,” &c., Isa. liii. 5. “He hath made him to be sin for us,” &c., 2

Cor. v. 21. "Christ was once offered," &c., Heb. ix. 28. "Who his own self bare our sins," &c., 1 Peter ii. 24. And the atonement of Christ for sin is the foundation of our hope of pardon. Hence remission of sins is preached in his name, Luke xxiv. 47; Acts xiii. 38, 39. And "God forgives men for Christ's sake," Ephes. iv. 32.—*Thirdly, from the promises of the Bible* "Come now and let us reason together," &c., Isa. i. 18. "Let the wicked forsake his way," &c., lv. 7. "All manner of sin and blasphemy," &c., Matt. xii. 31.—*Fourthly, from the testimonies of the saints.* Moses said to God, "Thou hast forgiven this people from Egypt even until now," Num. xiv. 19. "He being full of compassion, forgave their iniquity," Ps. lxxviii. 38. David said, "Thou forgavest the iniquity of my sin," Ps. xxxii. 5. Hezekiah declared, "Thou hast cast all my sins behind thy back," Isa. xxxviii. 17. "We have redemption through his blood, even the forgiveness of sins," Colos. i. 14. And if any other evidence be deemed necessary, to prove that our debts may be forgiven, the prayer in the text is sufficient. Christ has taught us to ask forgiveness; and what we are directed to ask, we may confidently hope to receive. But to whom is this forgiveness administered? To penitent believers; "He," (God) "pardoneth and absolveth all them that truly repent and unfeignedly believe his holy gospel." Repentance prepares the mind for the reception of pardon; and induces the sinner humbly and importunately to plead for it. Acts viii. 22. Faith enables him to claim the promises of forgiveness as his own, Acts xiii. 39.

III. THAT IT IS HIGHLY IMPORTANT AND DESIRABLE FOR US TO OBTAIN FORGIVENESS. Two things will serve to confirm the truth of this observation.

1. *A state of forgiveness is a state of positive enjoyment: Enjoyment*, arising from a consciousness of having escaped punishment; an unpardoned sinner is in danger of perdition; he is a child of wrath; God is angry with him, and punishment is threatened him; but when God forgives him, that wrath which was revealed from heaven against him is removed; and he has the knowledge of salvation, &c., Luke i. 77. *Enjoyment*, flowing from the peace of God which passeth all understanding. "For being justified by faith," &c., Rom. v. 1. *Enjoyment*, springing from the testimony of a good conscience, 2 Cor. i. 12. And how highly desirable is that state, which gives birth to enjoyments so divine, so rational, so pure, and so permanent!

2. *A state of forgiveness is a state of absolute security.* What has that man to fear, against whom Heaven has no accusation? "If God be for us, who can be against us? Who shall lay any thing to the charge of God's elect? It is God that justifieth. Who is he that condemneth?" A man who has obtained forgiveness from his God, may look every enemy in the face.—With his conscience he is at peace;—God will bruise Satan under his feet;—death will be to him a vanquished foe;—and heaven is his by title and by promise, Rom. viii. 17; 1 John ii. 25. Contemplating such privileges,—who can help exclaiming, "Blessed are they whose iniquities are forgiven, and whose sins are covered."

INFERENCES.

1. *If sins are debts, we cannot fail to recollect how awfully we are in arrears.* Let us make up our accounts, and as far as we can, form an estimate, ascertain how much we owe to God. Some of us are old and gray-headed! Oh what a debt is ours! How much have we received, but how little paid?

2. *Oh how promptly and earnestly should we sue for pardon.* Forgiveness is now offered, but if we delay to accept the generous offer, our great Creditor will issue an arrest against us, and we shall be cast into prison, and be confined in chains of darkness to the judgment of the great day.

3. *Has God forgiven your debts?* Cease not to reflect on the returns which duty binds you to make.—*Be grateful*, “Bless the LORD, O my soul,” &c., *Psa. ciii. 2, 3.* *Cultivate a spirit of forgiveness towards others*, *Matt. xviii. 23—35.* *Let your love to God bear some proportion to the greatness of the obligations you are under to him.* “There was a certain creditor which had two debtors,” &c., “and when they had nothing to pay, he frankly forgave them both; which of them will love him most?” *Luke vii. 42.*

PROPER METHOD OF PRAYING TO GOD.

Ps. xxv. 11.—For thy name's sake, O Lord, pardon mine iniquity! for it is great. (H. H.)

God is a mighty Sovereign, “who doth according to his own will,” “neither giveth account to us of any of his matters.” We may indeed mark the traces of wisdom and goodness in every thing which he does; but “his ways and his thoughts are very different from ours, and far above them.” In the dispensations of his providence he pays no regard to the moral characters of men, but “makes the sun to shine equally upon the evil and the good.” In the dispensations of his grace too he is far from preferring those whom we should think he would select. He often inclines the hearts of “publicans and harlots to enter into his kingdom,” while he leaves less abandoned Pharisees and Formalists to perish in their sins. This if it be an humiliating truth, is also replete with comfort. If it take away all grounds of boasting, it cuts off at the same time all occasion for despondency. If he “have a right to do what he will with his own,” the vilest person in the universe may approach him with a comfortable hope of acceptance, and may address him in the language of the text.

In these words of the Psalmist we may notice,

I. His CONFESSION—

David was not ashamed to confess that his sins were exceeding great—

There is no reason to think that David in this psalm adverts to his transgression with Bathsheba. It is probable that the psalm was penned many years before that event. The Royal Penitent speaks rather of his in-dwelling corruptions. He had long been accustomed to observe the workings of his own heart, and had often besought God to search and try him to the uttermost. *Ps. cxxxix. 23, 24.* In this way he had marked both the defects of his duties, and the evil propensities of his nature; and, from a review of all his actions, words, and thoughts, was led to acknowledge that his sin was exceeding great. Nor was this confession peculiar to him. Holy Job, as soon as he beheld his true character, exclaimed, “Behold, I am vile!” *Job xl. 4.* And Paul no sooner became acquainted with the purity and extent of God's law, than he saw himself a condemned sinner, and confessed, that “in him dwelt no good thing.” *Rom. vii. 9, 18.*

And does not a similar confession become us also?

Let us only review our past lives, and we shall find too much occasion for the deepest humiliation. Have not many of us been addicted to open, known iniquities? and do not the consciences of such persons testify against

them that their sin is great? Have not many also devoted all their time and attention to *secular* concerns? and will they account it a light thing thus to despise God, and idolize the world? Have not others satisfied themselves with a formal round of duties, in which their souls were never earnestly engaged? and can they suppose that God is pleased with a mere lip-service, when their hearts are far from him? Have not others professed Godliness indeed, but walked utterly unworthy of their profession, being as proud, and passionate, as worldly too, and covetous, as those who have made no such profession? and can *they* suppose their sin is not great, when sinners are hardened, and God is blasphemed through their means? — — But why do we speak of the *profane* and *worldly*, or the *formal* and *hypocritical*? Must not even the *saints* themselves blush and be confounded, when they consider how miserably they have fallen short in every thing? Must they not exclaim with St. Paul, “O wretched man that I am!”? Surely we must know little indeed of ourselves, if we do not all see how much the confession in the text is suited to our state.

When, like David, we are duly humbled under a sense of our guilt, we shall readily adopt,

II. HIS PETITION—

David could not rest without imploring forgiveness at God’s hands—

He found a sense of guilt to be an intolerable burthen to his soul; Ps. xxxviii. 4; and well knew that it would “eat as a canker,” till he had obtained the pardon of his sin. Hence he humbled himself before his God, and cried for mercy.

Nor shall *we* restrain prayer before God, if we will but consider the state of an unpardoned soul—

No words can fully express the misery of one who has all the guilt of his sins upon him. He has *no peace with God*, seeing that “God is angry with him every day,” and “the wrath of God abideth on him.” He has *no peace in his own conscience*; for though he may drown reflection for a while in business or pleasure, he is like the troubled sea which cannot rest, but casts up mire and dirt. Isa. lvii. 20. He is also *destitute* of any well-founded *hope*: he may buoy up himself with blind presumption; but he will feel many misgiving fears, and forebodings of evil. He has *no comfort in his afflictions*; for, not having God for his friend, he cannot go to him with confidence, or obtain those refreshing consolations which strengthen and uphold the godly. *In a dying hour* he is yet more *wretched*: if he be not insensible as a beast, how does he regret his mis-spent hours, and wish that God would prolong his state of probation! But *in the eternal world his misery is completed*: he comes to the tribunal of Justice without any Mediator to reconcile him to God, or any Advocate to plead his cause: yea, the very voice which just before importuned him to accept of mercy, now bids him “depart accursed:” and from that moment his doom is fixed in everlasting burnings. Now can any man reflect on this, and not see the need of crying earnestly for mercy? Can our petitions be too earnest, or too constant, when they are appointed, and the only means of escaping all this misery?

But in our application for mercy, we must be careful to use,

III. HIS PLEA—

The Psalmist derived all his hope of mercy from God himself—

He pleaded not the smallness of his offences or the multitude of his services, the depth of his penitence, or the fervor of his petitions. He knew that name, which had long before been proclaimed to Moses, to which, as to “a

strong tower, the righteous runneth and is safe;" and to *that* he fled for refuge; from *that* he derived his only hope, his only plea.

Nor can we present any other plea than the name, the sacred name of Jesus—

Under the Gospel we are taught more clearly to ask in the name of Jesus, and are assured that petitions so offered shall never fail of acceptance. John xiv. 13, 14. But it is no easy matter to offer that plea in sincerity. Perhaps there is not any thing in the world more difficult. *We naturally prefer any other plea that can be devised:* and, even when we find that we have not in ourselves any worthiness on which we can rely, we are still averse to rest on the name of Jesus. We either *deem it insufficient* to procure acceptance for our prayers, or *make our unworthiness a reason for declining to urge it as our plea* with any confidence before God. But, unless we renounce every other hope, and rest entirely on the mediation and intercession of Christ, our prayer will never enter into the ears of our heavenly Father—

OBSERVATIONS:

1. The vilest of sinners has no reason to despair—

The confession, petition, and plea, which David presented at the throne of Grace, are suited to the very chief of sinners: nor, as the subsequent experience of David proves, can there be any state in which they shall not prevail. Let none then despond. Be it so, Our iniquities are great; but are they greater than Christ's merits, or beyond the reach of God's mercy? If not, let us exalt our adorable Saviour, and determine, if we perish, to perish crying for mercy in the name of Jesus.

2. The most eminent saints have no ground to boast—

There never was a creature that had any righteousness of his own to plead. And if God has had mercy upon any, it was purely and entirely for his own name sake. Ezek. xxxvi. 22, 32. Could we ascend to heaven, and ask the glorified saints what had been the ground of their acceptance, they would all "cast down their crowns at the feet of Jesus," and shout, with one consent, "Salvation to God and to the Lamb!" Rev. iv. 10, and vii. 10.—Let the saints on earth then lie low before God, and say continually, "Not unto us, O Lord, not unto us, but unto thy *name* be the praise."

3. Persons of every description must guard diligently against pride and unbelief—

Sin, of whatever kind, is both evil in itself and dangerous to us. But the consequences of pride and unbelief are peculiarly fatal. There is not any other sin which may not be forgiven, provided we seek mercy with real penitence and faith. But if we be too proud to confess our sins, and to plead the name and merits of Jesus for the forgiveness of them, we insure and seal our own condemnation. Let us then guard against *all* sin; but especially against these, which rivet all our other sins upon us. So shall we obtain favor with God, and "be to him for a name and for a praise for evermore. Jer. xiii. 11.

THE BENEFIT OF PRAYER.

John xvi. 24.—Ask, and ye shall receive; that your joy may be full. (H. H.)

THIS world is justly characterized as a vale of tears. Even they who experience the most happiness, find many interruptions of it: nor is there any way of securing permanent tranquility, but by waiting upon God in prayer.

The disciples were sorrowful on account of the approaching departure of their Lord, with whom they had hitherto enjoyed the most familiar fellowship. Our Lord tells them, that though they would no longer be able to *inquire*, ver. 23, *ἐρωτᾶν*, of him, yet, if they would *ask*, ib. *αἰτεῖν*, of the Father in his name, he would grant them whatsoever they should need; and that the answers which they should receive to their prayers would abundantly overbalance the loss of their present privileges, and fill them with unutterable joy.

In the direction given them, we may notice,

I. OUR DUTY—

It is comprised in one word, “Ask.” Now this is,

1. An easy duty—

We do not mean that it is always easy to pray, (for there is nothing more difficult when the heart is indisposed for that exercise;) but that is the easiest condition that could possibly be imposed— —and that, when the heart is in a proper frame, prayer is as easy to the soul, as breathing is to the body: it is the first, and most natural, effort of a living soul: “Behold, he prayeth!” Acts ix. 11.

2. A reasonable duty—

Man is a dependent creature; and it is but reasonable that he should acknowledge that dependence at a throne of grace, and ask for those mercies which he stands in need of. The very heathens have felt the propriety of supplicating their deities, and have established ordinances whereby they might conciliate the favor of their gods. It is true, that God knows our necessities before we ask: yet is it highly proper that we should spread them before him, in order that we ourselves may be humbled under a sense of them, and that God’s mercy in relieving them may be more clearly seen.

3. A necessary duty—

Though God cannot be prevailed upon by dint of importunity,* yet he has appointed prayer as the means of obtaining his blessings. He has said, “I will be inquired of to do it for them.” Ezek. xxxvi. 37. There is no room therefore left for us to speculate upon the use of prayer: it is quite sufficient that God has required it as means to an end: and if we will not comply with his injunctions respecting it, it is utterly in vain for us to expect his blessings.

4. An acceptable duty—

Prayer offered to the Deity without any respect to the mediation of Christ, is not acceptable; but when presented in an humble dependence on his atonement, and intercession, it comes up before God as incense, and prevails beyond the utmost extent of our conceptions. It is to prayer *offered in this manner*, that the promise in the text is given. Ver. 23, 24. And this has been the qualification of all acceptable prayer from the beginning. Abel was heard on account of his sacrifice. Heb. xi. 4. The penitents under the law obtained mercy in no other way. Heb. ix. 22. The Jews, when unable

* The expressions, Luke xviii. 7, 8, must not lead us to think of God as though he were wrought upon as we are.

by reason of their captivity, to offer their accustomed sacrifices, were to look towards the temple, which was a type of our incarnate God. 1 Kings viii 47, 48; Dan. vi. 10. And to that same Jesus must we look, trusting in him as "our Advocate with the Father, and as the propitiation for our sins." 1 John ii. 1, 2. Nor did any one ever ask *in this manner* without obtaining a supply of all his wants.

To counteract the backwardness of our hearts to this duty, let us consider,

II. OUR ENCOURAGEMENT TO PERFORM IT—

The promise of acceptance is without any limit or exception—

There is no exception with respect to the persons who may apply to God. The vilest person in the universe, provided he ask *in the manner prescribed in the text*, shall be heard as readily as the very chief of the apostles. His past iniquities, of whatever kind they have been, shall not operate as any bar to his acceptance with God— — —

Nor is there any limit respecting the blessings we implore: provided they will really conduce to our good, and to God's glory, they shall be given. However "wide we open our mouths, God will fill them"— — — Ps. lxxxii. 10; John xiv. 13, 14. The frequent and solemn repetition of this truth by our Lord himself, must of necessity remove all doubt upon the subject. Matt. vii. 7, 8.

And instances of its accomplishment occur in almost every page of the sacred writings—

Whether Abel's prayer was answered by fire from heaven which consumed his sacrifice, or by some other token of the divine favor, the acceptance of it was equally manifest, and the fact is equally encouraging to us. To recount the various instances that occurred from that period to the times of Christ and his apostles, would be a pleasing task, but would occupy many hours. Suffice it to say, that whether men's prayer has been offered for themselves Jonah ii. 1, 7, or for others, Exod. xxxii. 11—14; Acts xii. 5—9, and whether it has been of a more stated and solemn kind, Ps. xviii. 6, or only in a sudden ejaculation, Neh. ii. 4—6, it has equally prevailed; it has prevailed speedily, 2 Kings xx. 2, 4, 5; Dan. ix. 20, 21, 23, and to a most incredible extent; Jam. v. 17, 18; and shall yet prevail, by whomsoever it may be offered, ib. ver. 16.

This encouragement to prayer is greatly heightened by what is added respecting,

III. THE CONSEQUENCE OF A DUE AND ACCEPTABLE PERFORMANCE OF IT—

God delights in the prosperity of his people; and desires that they should be happy here, as well as in the world to come. It is with this view that he has enjoined prayer as a duty; because, when performed aright, it is the means of filling the soul with the sublimest joy.

1. It tranquilizes the most perturbed mind—

Let a person under any sudden irritation, or calamity betake himself to prayer, and he will speedily find the tempest calmed, and his agitations quieted. No other thing will operate like this. It will enable him to educe good out of every evil: it will not only blunt the edge of all his trials, but will turn his sorrows into joy. Ps. xxx. 8—11, and xl. 1—3.

2. It brings God nigh unto the soul—

God in answer to prayer will take away the veil which intercepts our views of him, and "manifest himself to us, as he does not unto the world." What an exhibition of his glory was that which he vouchsafed to Moses! What a bright display of Christ's excellency was that which the three favored disciples were admitted to behold on Mount Tabor! We say not indeed

that any similar vision of the Father or the Son shall ever be presented to our bodily eyes: but God will certainly "shine into the hearts of those who call upon him, to give them the light of the knowledge of his glory in the face of Jesus Christ;" 2 Cor. iv. 6; and will enable them to say, "Truly our fellowship is with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ." 1 John i. 3. What ineffable delight must such manifestations bring with them!—

3. It gives us an earnest and foretaste of heaven itself—

The happiness of heaven consists in the vision and fruition of God: and this, as far as it can be enjoyed by faith, is enjoyed in prayer. There is not any one who has abounded in the performance of this duty, but has had frequent occasion, when in his closet, to exclaim with Jacob, "This is none other but the house of God, this is the gate of heaven!" Gen. xxviii. 17. In such seasons as these a man has no occasion to search out evidences of his acceptance with God, or of his title to heaven; for the very intercourse which he has with the deity is, if we may so speak, heaven brought down to earth; it is an actual anticipation of heaven, and a pledge of his complete possession of it in due season.

ADDRESS,

1. To those who ask without receiving—

Think not that God has violated his promise. The reason of your not receiving is, that "you ask amiss." Jam. iv. 3. Your petitions are cold, formal, hypocritical; and you have not a due respect to the name of Jesus in presenting them to God. Perform your duty as you ought, and you shall never complain of a want of acceptance in it.

2. To those who have received answers to prayer—

Let not your communion with God puff you up with pride, but rather abase you in the dust. If once you grow vain and secure, you will provoke God to hide his face from you, and to withhold the communications of his grace. Rejoice in the glorious privileges you possess; but "rejoice with trembling."

THE BREAD OF LIFE.

John vi. 34.—Lord, evermore give us this bread. (Sk.)

THERE is displayed in the gospel a most admirable and delightful combination of doctrines, precepts, and promises; and the performance of each christian duty entitles us to the enjoyment of some gracious promise. This sentiment is exemplified in no employment more than that of prayer; an engagement in which all good men have delighted, and the pleasure of which increases in proportion to the frequency of its repetition and the fervor of its exercise. Thank God none need be at a loss for words in his addresses to the Divine Being: for, in addition to that comprehensive form of prayer, significantly designated "the Lord's Prayer," sentiments of petition, supplication, and intercession are interspersed through the inspired volume, many of which were used by holy men; who were disciples of our Lord, who heard the gracious words that dropped from his lips, and who were favored by his immediate instruction; one of these is recorded in the text. Our Lord had been pointing out the amazing superiority which he and his dispensation

possessed over the dispensation of food which miraculously sustained the Israelites in the wilderness. The disciples heard with attention, and when he had ended his instructive observations, they unanimously cried out, "Lord, evermore give us this bread." Observe in this prayer,

I. A BLESSING REQUESTED;—"This bread;" that is, the true bread from heaven," for the bread of God is He that cometh down from heaven, and giveth life unto the world," ver. 33. Bread is here, by Jesus Christ, represented as a type of himself; and to show its propriety, remark,

1. *Bread is of a vivifying quality.* Metaphors, which are drawn from earthly objects to represent heavenly ones, must necessarily be defective in expressing their full meaning. Bread, though of a reviving nature, cannot restore animation, when life is extinct; but the bread of heaven finds us in a state of death, and its efficacy is manifested in communicating life to our souls, Eph. ii. 1, as well as in supporting that life in all circumstances, Ps. xxiii. 2, 5.

2. *Bread is congenial to all appetites.* All have *naturally* a disposition for bread; and in the same manner, Christ, the bread from heaven, is exactly suited to satisfy the spiritual appetites of mankind; and as some tastes are vitiated to such a degree, that they do not relish bread, so many sinners prefer feeding on ashes and husks rather than on Christ, Luke xv. 16; Isa. lv. 2, xlv. 20.

3. *Bread is the common gift of God to the world.* Only a few possess the luxuries of life; but bread is for all, it is the greatest blessing that God ever bestowed for the support of animal life; and "God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him might not perish, but have everlasting life," &c., John iii. 16, 17; and this is the greatest blessing the Almighty ever bestowed for the benefit of our souls. John xv. 5.

4. *Bread can only be useful as we partake of it.* It may be in our hands, but unless we feed upon it, it will be of no benefit to us. We hear Christ preached, we attend on his ordinances; but in vain is all this, unless we stretch forth the hand, eat, and live for ever, John vi. 27; 1 Cor. xi. 24.

II. A PERSON ADDRESSED;—"Lord;" who is the proper object of prayer, because,

1. *Prayer is the language of need;* and of this humanity is full. No sun rises that does not cast his beams on our wants; and whither should we go, but to Him, in whom dwelleth all the fulness necessary to supply the wants of mankind, John vi. 68; Col. ii. 9.

2. *Prayer is the expression of a dependent to a superior.* And who gave us life? who has supported it to the present moment? That God on whom we and all other created beings depend, Gen. i. 26, 27; Acts xvii. 26, 28.

3. *Prayer is the result of hope;* and surely, if ever there was a foundation for hope, it is in God, Ps. xlii. 11. He has condescended to assume the most endearing and encouraging characters, in his relations to mankind, Ps. xlviii. 14; 2 Cor. vi. 18. He has deigned to promise the full supply of our wants, and abundance of both temporal and spiritual blessings, 1 Pet. i. 4; Ps. cxxx. 8, xxxvii. 25. He has been the God of our fathers, 2 Cor. i. 10. Hope in the Lord is therefore founded upon a sure and rational basis.

III. A MODE OF COMMUNICATION STATED;—"Give us this bread."

1. *Because we can no more maintain spiritual life without it, than our bodies can live without food.*

2. *Because we cannot borrow it with any possibility of returning it, on account of our necessitous circumstances.* Nor do we ever receive more of this bread than we can use, Rev. iii. 17.

3. *Because we cannot purchase it;* having been plundered by sin of every valuable we possessed, Acts viii. 20, 21.

4. *Because we cannot earn it;* we have been disabled, nor can we move till we receive this invaluable restorative; and if we receive it, it must be as a gift, Luke x. 30; Tit. iii. 5.

IV. A PERIOD FOR ITS CONTINUANCE SPECIFIED?—"evermore."

1. *Because in this world we shall always need it.* To whatever state of grace a man may attain, he is still liable to fall, as appears from a variety of petitions and cautions which the scriptures contain, Psa. li. 12; Prov. i. 24—32; Matt. xxiv. 13; Luke ix. 62; 1 Tim. i. 19, 20; Heb. x. 38. 39. Let the Almighty withdraw his support for one moment, and we must die, and die eternally, Psa. lx. 11; Lam. iv. 16, 17.

2. *Because the stores of divine goodness cannot be exhausted.* Gratitude to an earthly benefactor will often prevent us from being importunate in our requests, lest by giving to us, he should impoverish himself; but this cannot be the case with the bread that cometh down from heaven, for that is undiminishable, Eph. iii. 18, 19.

3. *Because it always will retain its efficacy and virtue.* Unalterable in quantity, it is also unchangeable in quality, Heb. xiii. 8.

4. *Because it does not induce satiety.* Earthly food is too gross to allow its unintermitting use; but on the contrary, as we receive this divine bread, our capacities to make use of it are enlarged, and our appetite increased for its continued communication.

5. *Because in the world to come it will constitute our joy and felicity.* Christ will still be the only delight of his saints, and will be their exceeding great reward for ever and ever, Rev. vii. 9—17.

NOTICE,

1. This bread must be sought with penitence, Matt. v. 4.

2. This bread will be found by faith, John iii. 36.

3. This bread must be received with gratitude, Psa. xcii. 1.

Have my hearers ever received the blessing of which we have spoken? if not, let the language of your hearts be, "Lord, evermore give us this bread:" for "Blessed is he that shall eat this bread in the kingdom of God."

FEEDING ON CHRIST THE ONLY MEANS OF SPIRITUAL LIFE.

John vi. 53—58.—Verily, verily, I say unto you, Except ye eat the flesh of the Son of Man, and drink his blood, ye have no life in you. Whoso eateth my flesh, and drinketh my blood, hath eternal life; and I will raise him up at the last day. For my flesh is meat indeed, and my blood is drink indeed. He that eateth my flesh, and drinketh my blood, dwelleth in me, and I in him, As the living Father hath sent me, and I live by the Father; so he that eateth me, even he shall live by me. This is that bread which came down from heaven: not as your fathers did eat manna, and are dead: he that eateth of this bread shall live for ever. (B.)

The circumstances under which these words were spoken, are the following.

Consider,

I. WHAT WE ARE TO UNDERSTAND BY "EATING THE FLESH OF THE SON OF MAN, AND DRINKING HIS BLOOD."

Eating his flesh, and drinking his blood, literally and carnally, as the Jews supposed, ver. 52, is not here meant; and this notion Jesus refuted and repelled. Ver. 63.—

Nor is the eating his flesh under the form of bread, and drinking his blood under that of wine, intended here, as the Papists suppose; nor the partaking the signs of his flesh and blood, as the Protestants speak, in the holy Eucharist.—For the Lord's Supper was not then instituted, and however Jesus might have the design of that sacrament in his mind, and make use of terms applicable to it, it is certain his hearers could not understand him as speaking respecting it.—In the case of the converted thief, and all that died in the faith, before the institution of that ordinance, it was not necessary to salvation, but the eating and drinking Christ's flesh and blood, is here declared to be necessary. Ver. 53.—It may be observed, also, that a participation of the Lord's Supper does not necessarily and universally produce the effects which are ascribed to the feeding on Christ, which is treated of in this discourse. Ver. 54—58.

The eating of Christ's flesh and drinking his blood, spoken of in the text, is of a spiritual kind, and means a participation in his merits, or an interest in his sufferings and death, in his blood and righteousness, his atonement and mediation, for our justification, sanctification, and spiritual consolation.—This is done by the agency of the Holy Spirit.—And hence it implies that we partake of his Spirit; ver. 63; 1 Cor. xii. 13; John iv. 10; vii. 37, 38; as the fruit of his death and resurrection, viz. to quicken, renew, Tit. iii. 5—7, strengthen, and comfort us.— — His Word also is implied; ver. 63; confirmed by his death, being the means of feeding us with knowledge, of refreshing, supporting, and nourishing our minds. The doctrines of the Word are often represented under this metaphor. Prov. ix. 5; Isa. lv. 2; Eccles. xxiv. 21. Now we are thus to partake of Christ by faith; by which we are persuaded of the sufficiency of his merits, and rely thereon for justification; persuaded of the efficacy of his Spirit, and apply for it, in order to regeneration, and renewal in righteousness; convinced and assured of the truth and importance of his Word, and yield a due attention to it, maturely considering and inwardly digesting it.

II. THE NECESSITY OF THIS, AND THE ADVANTAGES THAT RESULT FROM IT.

Without feeding thus on Christ, we "have no life in us;" ver. 53; we may have natural and animal life, vital heat, and motion; we may breathe, and speak, and use our bodily senses; we may have rational life, may apprehend, reason, judge, choose, and so forth. But we have not spiritual life; the favor of God, Psa. xxx. 5, union with him, Eph. iv. 18, a spiritual mind, Rom. viii. 6, spiritual warmth, or zeal breathing in prayer and praise, spiritual senses, a discerning and understanding mind, a vigorous choice, just judgment, and lively affections towards God. We have not eternal life, no title to it, no meetness for it, nor earnest of it. 1 John v. 11, 12.

If we do eat Christ's flesh and drink his blood, we have eternal life; ver. 54; a title to it in our justification; a fitness for it in our progressive sanctification; an earnest, or the beginning of it, in communion with God.

This is proved by the following verses. His, "flesh is meat indeed;" or is truly meat, and the most excellent meat; and his "blood is drink indeed." Ver. 55. Hereby we are refreshed, as with meat and drink; strengthened for our spiritual warfare, duty, and suffering, and nourished up to eternal life.—Hereby we have union with Christ, and a continuance thereof; ver.

56, we have the present life of grace; ver. 57; and shall have the future life of glory. Ver. 58.

III. HOW WE MAY THUS EAT THE FLESH AND DRINK THE BLOOD OF CHRIST, AND THE STEPS TO BE TAKEN IN ORDER TO IT.

We must prefer this spiritual meat before the bodily "meat which perisheth," ver. 27, and all earthly things.—We must expect it from Christ, as a *free gift*, ver. 27, 31—34, and must have no reliance on our own merit.—We must "come to him" for it, ver. 34—37, by prayer, in faith, being persuaded he will give it, and depending entirely on his power, love, and faithfulness.—We must, therefore, be "taught of God," by his Word, Spirit, and Providence; ver. 45; receiving thereby illumination, conviction, discipline.—We must be "drawn" by the Father. Ver. 43, 44. An attention to the great principles of natural religion, and obedience to its dictates, is a preparation for christianity. "If any man will do his will, he shall know of the doctrine, whether it be of God." John vii. 17.— — The miracles of God, the promises of God, the dispensations of Providence, especially afflictive ones, the influences of the Spirit, are given, and free for all. Thus he draws, "first by the iron chains of legal convictions, and secondly by the silken cords of redeeming love."* Instances of the former method we have in the Jailor, Acts xvi. 30, in David, Psa. xxxii. 4, in the Jews, Acts ii. 37, in Saul, Acts ix. 5, in the Woman of Canaan, Matt. xv. 22—28; and of the latter in the Woman of Samaria, John iv. 7—26, in Zaccheus, Luke xix. 2—10, in the Disciples,—in Lydia. Acts xvi. 14. Without this drawing, no man can or will come to Christ, whether he be moral or immoral, Jew or nominal christian, learned or unlearned, young or old. For, naturally, he neither feels nor sees his need of coming to Jesus; he has neither power nor will to come, being chained down by ignorance, pride, and self-conceit, by sloth, by unbelief, and hardness of heart.—This is a true, but humbling doctrine: and that the Father is "not willing any should perish," but is ready to draw all to Christ, is most encouraging.

APPLICATION.

Have you eaten the flesh and drunk the blood of Jesus Christ? Examine yourselves particularly.— —If you have not, your state is wretched and dangerous; and you have need to come without delay; and, therefore, to be drawn by the Father.—Be willing, be desirous to be drawn, or to hear him say, "Depart, ye cursed;" pray that he would draw you; yield to his attraction, "hear and learn of the Father;" hear the voice of his works, his Providence, his Word, his promises, his threatenings; hear the still small voice of his Spirit, and follow his direction.—Are you mourning for him; hungering for the bread of life, that "you may eat thereof, and not die?" Ver. 50. Then, he is drawing you; be encouraged and thankful.—Have you come to him, and partaken of his flesh and blood? Then, again, be thankful, and continue to feed on him, and use the strength you have received to his glory

* Fletcher.

BAPTISM

Acts ii. 38—41.—Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ, for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost: for the promise is unto you, and to your children, and to all that are afar off, even as many as the Lord our God shall call. And with many other words did he testify and exhort, saying, Save yourselves from this untoward generation. Then they that gladly received his word were baptized: and the same day there were added unto them about three thousand souls. (Pr.)

WE here see the apostles in a very interesting situation, making their first general attack on the kingdom of darkness; opening their commission which Jesus gave them at his ascension, and “beginning at Jerusalem.”

There were several important circumstances which attended the commencement of the apostolic mission. — 1. It was preceded by prayer: ch. i. 12—14. — 2. By intimate union among themselves: ii. 1. — 3. By an extraordinary outpouring of the Holy Spirit: ii. 2, 3. — The people beholding these things, some doubted, and others were filled with reproach; and this gives occasion for Peter’s address in the words of our text. — The effect is, the murderers of Christ are pricked to the heart, and are exhorted to be baptized.

I. OFFER SOME EXPLANATORY REMARKS UPON THE TEXT.

1. They are exhorted to *repent*, and this previous to their being baptized. — Repentance is not a mere *reformation* of conduct, for that would not have been connected with “the remission of sins.” — Nor does it consist merely in being *alarmed* at the consequences, for they were already in a state of alarm. — But it denotes a *change of heart*, sorrow for having sinned, not in that instance only, but in every other, though conviction might begin with that. It was a spiritual and evangelical repentance which the apostle required, such as is connected with faith in Christ and the remission of sins, and such as John preached. Acts xix. 4.

This exhortation does not merely point out what was their immediate duty: it also contains an intimation of mercy. — The fallen angels were not so admonished when they had sinned, but were pronounced accursed: and if we also had been left under the curse, there would have been no place for repentance.

2. They are next exhorted to be *baptized*. — Baptism is a solemn institution of Christ, by which we profess his name, and acknowledge ourselves to be his. It was therefore exhorting them to become his disciples, and to make an open profession of their love to him, even as they had formerly avowed their enmity against him. — They were required to believe in him, to own him as their Lord, and to take his yoke upon them. — It was also an act of obedience, to prove their faith in Jesus, and their love to him. Our submission to this ordinance must also be performed in obedience to the same authority.

3. Be baptized *every one of you*, is the divine command. Every one that heard the gospel was exhorted to repent, and every one that repented was commanded to be baptized. — We here see that it is not left as a matter of discretion, much less of indifference; but baptism is binding on all those who are the subjects of repentance and of faith. — Some indeed admit it to be a duty to those who *see* it to be so: but they think that is all. — True indeed it is, that a blind obedience is not required; but that those who profess the gospel should read and understand and obey from the heart the precepts which it inculcates.

4. This obedience is to be performed *in the name of the Lord Jesus.*

—— This denotes not so much the form of administration, as the authority on which it rests, and at the same time points out the medium of salvation.

—— Christ is Lord of the church, and of the souls of men; and what is done in religion is to be to his glory, and from regard to his authority.

5. Baptism is to be attended to, for *the remission of sins.* —— When Paul was converted, it was said to him, “Arise and be baptized, and wash away thy sins;” not literally, as if it possessed such a virtue in itself; but in the same sense, as we are said to “eat the flesh and drink the blood of Christ,” in the sacred supper. —— Baptism was a sign of forgiveness, and an emblem of the fountain opened for sin and uncleanness. —— The real and only ground of forgiveness is the atonement of Christ; and this is intimated in their being baptized in his name, as in chap. x. 43.

6. They shall receive *the gift of the Holy Spirit:* this was extraordinary. —— They should receive that very blessing of which they doubted and wondered—the spirit of prophecy: ver. 16, 17.

7. The promise is *to you and your children.* This was the encouragement addressed to the primitive converts, and the same is addressed to us—

1. Observe, the *promise* refers not to that which was made to Abraham, which included all his spiritual seed; but to that mentioned by Joel, and which is referred to in ver. 16, 17; compared with Joel ii. 28.

2. The term *children* here does not mean infants, but adults, the “sons and daughters that should see visions, and prophesy;” that is, the Jewish posterity; as when we speak of the “children of Israel,” we do not mean the infant offspring of Jacob, but all his descendants in the times of Moses.

3. That which rendered the promise so peculiarly seasonable now was, that it stood against *the curse* which they had so awfully imprecated: “his blood be on us and on our children.” Being pricked to their hearts, they might now think that the curse was coming upon them.

4. While it encouraged the penitent Jews, it also excluded their national prejudices and vanity; for the promise was to them that were *afar off*, among the Gentiles, as well as to them that are nigh.

5. The whole, whether to Jews or Gentiles, is restricted to *as many as the Lord should call.* This promise therefore cannot apply to any who are not called.

8. With many other words did Peter exhort his hearers *to save themselves* from that generation. —— Repentance for sin, faith in Christ, and being baptized in his name, is the way in which they were to “save themselves:” not as authors of their own salvation, yet as being active in fleeing for refuge, as Lot did out of Sodom, or as the manslayer from the avenger of blood.

9. It is added, “Then they that gladly received his word *were baptized,*” though probably not all who were pricked in their hearts: for there might be many left, and we still see various characters in whom convictions have not this issue. True faith is receiving the word with gladness; not merely having the truth forced upon the conscience, but the heart open to receive it, and that with cordial approbation and inward joy.

II. DRAW SOME CONCLUSIONS FROM THE SUBJECT.

1. Observe, that God’s truth sometimes finds its way to *men’s consciences*, and that only: but this is not conversion. —— It is not enough to be pricked to the heart: we must repent and believe the gospel. —— Many rest in their convictions, and too many preachers give encouragement to such, as if these were evidences of grace. But not so with Peter, nor Paul and Silas, when they addressed the convicted and trembling jailor. Acts xvi. 31.

2. If we truly repent and believe the gospel, we must prove *the sincerity* of our faith by taking the yoke of Christ upon us, and keeping his commands. — It is a sad way of reasoning, that because we believe, we need not therefore obey; and that because baptism is not essential, we may therefore be saved without it.

3. The argument from the text, in favor of *infant baptism*, is utterly groundless; for “as many” as received the word were baptized, and such only.

4. We learn the satisfaction there is in following the example of *primitive christians*, in keeping the commands of our Saviour. This has the promise of his abiding presence. Matt. xxviii. 20.

THE DESIGN AND IMPORTANCE OF THE LORD'S SUPPER.

1 Cor. xi. 24, 26.—This do in remembrance of me for as often as ye eat this bread, and drink this cup, ye do shew the Lord's death till he come. (S. S.)

THE Corinthians had shamefully profaned the Lord's Supper—
St. Paul reproves them, and rectifies their views of that ordinance—

I. THE DESIGN OF THE LORD'S SUPPER.

Our ungrateful hearts are prone to forget the richest mercies—

To keep up “the remembrance” of his death, Christ instituted his last supper—

When we celebrate that ordinance, we “shew forth” his death.

The passover was a memorial of the deliverance vouchsafed to the Jews from the sword of the destroying angel—

At every returning celebration of it the reason of that ordinance was declared—*

Christ in his death has effected a greater deliverance for us—

In partaking of the bread and wine we “shew forth” his death—

We shew forth *the manner of it* as excruciating and bloody—†

We shew forth *the end of it* as a sacrifice for our sins—‡

We shew forth *the sufficiency of it* for our full salvation—§

We shew forth his death “till he come”

Christ will, in due season, come again to judge the world—

Then his people will no longer need such memorials as these—

They will incessantly enjoy the brightest vision of his person, and the richest fruits of his death—

* In reference to Exod. xii. 26, 27, a custom obtained among the Jews that a child should ask the meaning of the passover, and that the person who presided should then give an account of its intent and origin, that so the remembrance of God's mercy might be transmitted to their latest posterity: and this was called “the declaration” or “shewing forth.” Dr. Gill on the text.

† The breaking of the bread and the pouring out of the wine seem well calculated to impress this idea.

‡ In this light it is represented by St. Paul, 1 Cor. v. 7, and by our Lord himself, Matt. xxvi. 28.

§ We express our affiance in his blood as the Jews did in the blood of the Paschal Lamb, when they sprinkled their door-posts with it, and eat of the flesh that had been roast with fire.

But till then the remembrance of his dying love, and the expectation of his future advent, must be thus preserved—

Such was Christ's end in instituting, and such should be our end in observing it—

To enforce the observance of this ordinance, we will proceed to shew,

II. THE NECESSITY OF ATTENDING IT.

The duty of commemorating our Lord's death is much neglected.

But a neglect of it involves us in the deepest guilt—

It implies,

1. Rebellion against the highest authority

Christ, the supreme governor of heaven and earth, has said, "Do this"—

Yet the language of too many is, "I will not"—

But they who disregarded *the passover* did not go unpunished—*

Much less shall they who slight the invitations to *Christ's supper*—Luke xiv. 24.

Surely it is no less than madness to persist in this rebellion—

2. Ingratitude towards our greatest benefactor

Christ has even "given his own life a ransom for us"—

And shall we disregard his dying command?—

On the same night that he was betrayed, did he institute these memorials of his death—

Had he *at that season* such a concern for us, and can we refuse to do so small a thing in remembrance of him?—

The Jews went thrice every year up to Jerusalem, from the extreme parts of Judea, to commemorate their deliverance—

And shall we turn our backs on the table when it is spread before us?—

Shall not God visit for such ingratitude as this?—†

3. Contempt of the richest mercies

To communicate, without discerning the Lord's body, can profit us nothing—

But to approach the table in humility and faith is a sure mean of obtaining all spiritual blessings—

Christ sometimes reveals himself in the breaking of bread, to those who had not so fully discovered him in the ministration of the word—Luke xxiv. 30, 31.

And do they not manifest a contempt of these mercies, who will not use the means of procuring them?—

How may the Saviour take up that lamentation over them!—Matt. xxiii 37.

4. A renunciation of our baptismal covenant

In baptism we covenanted to renounce the world, &c., and to serve God—

This covenant we ought to renew and confirm at the Lord's table—

But our refusing to confirm it is a tacit renunciation of it—

And can we hope that God will fulfil his part while we violate ours?—

* If a man had contracted any ceremonial defilement, or were on a journey, he might omit eating the passover at the appointed time; only he must eat it a month afterwards. But if he forbore to eat of it without any such impediment, God said concerning him, "that soul shall be cut off, *that man shall bear his sin.*" Numb. ix. 7—11.

† Let such conduct be expressed in words: "Thou didst indeed give thy body to be broken, &c., for me; and only requirest me to eat bread, &c., in remembrance of thee; but I account even that too much to do for thee." Who could dare to utter such language? Or who would endure it if spoken by his servant or his child? Yet such is the language of our actions.

Will he be our God when we refuse to be his people?—

We shall CONCLUDE with answering some excuses.

“I am not prepared”—How then can you be prepared to die!—*

“I am afraid of eating and drinking my own damnation”—

Are you not afraid of damnation for neglecting your duty?—†

“I am afraid of sinning afterwards, and thereby increasing my guilt”—

If sins after receiving the Lord's Supper were unpardonable, none should receive it till the last moment of their lives—‡

“The time of administering it interferes with other engagements”—

To those who cannot deny themselves in any thing, we say with Paul—Rom. iii. 8, ad fin.

But where the difficulties are insurmountable, God will accept the will for the deed—Matt. xii. 7.

They however, who are at liberty, should attend “as often” as they can—

Only they must be careful to communicate with reverence, humility, faith, and gratitude.

ON THE PREPARATION REQUISITE BEFORE THE LORD'S SUPPER.

1 Cor. xi. 28.—Let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of that bread and drink of that cup. (S. S.)

God is an holy and jealous God, and greatly to be feared—

In all our approaches to him we should be filled with awe—

But a want of reverence prevails among the generality of mankind—

Even real christians manifest it sometimes, and that too even in the most sacred ordinances—

St. Paul, reproving the Corinthians for their conduct at the Lord's Supper, lays down an universal rule for communicants—“Let a man,” &c.

I. THE DUTY OF SELF-EXAMINATION IN GENERAL—

This is an important but much neglected duty—

It is strongly recommended in the scriptures—

The apostle expressly enjoins it on all—2 Cor. xiii. 5.

This injunction is remarkably strong and energetic— — —

There is great reason for it—

We cannot ascertain the state of our souls without it

It is evident that the generality of men deceive themselves—

We also are liable to the same deception through pride and self-love—

Nor can we form a right conclusion without a strict investigation—

A mistake respecting our state would be fatal

There is no repentance in the grave—

As we die, so shall we continue for ever—

The benefits to be derived from it are exceeding great.

* Is not this acknowledgment the strongest reason for immediate repentance?

† In neglecting duty you insure condemnation; in practising it as well as you can (to say the least) you may avert it.

‡ If you really desire strength, where would you so soon obtain it? But if you determine to live in sin, your condemnation will be equally sure whether you come or not.

If our state be found good, we shall rejoice in the testimony of a good conscience—

If it be bad, we shall be stirred up to flee from the wrath to come—

We should therefore live in the habitual practice of this duty—Ps. lxxvii. 5.

But self-examination is more especially needful on certain occasions—

II. THE NEED OF IT BEFORE THE LORD'S SUPPER IN PARTICULAR.

This is intimated in the text; "Let a man examine himself, and so let him come"—

And indeed there is peculiar reason for it at that time—

That ordinance is a season of remarkable solemnity

There we see Christ crucified, as it were, before our eyes—

There we contemplate the most stupendous mysteries—

There we commemorate the greatest of all mercies—

There we are admitted to most familiar fellowship with God—

And does it become us to engage lightly in such an ordinance?—

It is a season that calls for the exercise of all our powers

The understanding should be occupied in devoutest meditations—

The affections should be engaged to the uttermost—

And can we thus command our faculties without any preparation?—

The neglect of self-examination may rob us of all the benefit of the ordinance.

Who can estimate the benefits we might receive if we came prepared?—

But who has not often communicated in vain?—

And has not our neglect been the true cause of this?—

We should therefore be peculiarly attentive to it at such a season

To assist in the discharge of this duty we shall shew,

III. THE SUBJECTS WHICH WE SHOULD THEN MORE ESPECIALLY ENQUIRE

INTO.

We should examine ourselves respecting

Our knowledge of the ordinance itself.

To come without a proper discernment is dangerous—Ver. 27.

We should enquire what we know of the nature and ends of the ordinance—

On a distinct view of these our profiting much depends—

The state of our souls before God

At the Lord's table we receive "the children's bread"—

We should enquire therefore whether we be God's children?—

The immediate frame of our souls

We ought to have all our graces in lively exercise—Cant. iv. 16.

APPLICATION.

Begin this necessary work without delay— — —

Yet set not about it in a legal manner or for self-righteous ends—

Do not trust in your preparation, or expect acceptance on account of it—

But look to Christ as the only ground of your hope towards God—

Neither stay away from the table because you have not spent so much time in preparation as you could wish—

Whether you have used more or less diligence you must go as the publican—Luke xviii. 13.

Be assured however that your profiting will for the most part be proportioned to your preparation.

THE CELEBRATION OF THE LORD'S SUPPER A CHRISTIAN DUTY.

I Cor. v. 7, 8.—Purge out therefore the old leaven, that ye may be a new lump, as ye are unleavened.—For even Christ our passover is sacrificed for us: therefore let us keep the feast, not with old leaven, neither with the leaven of malice and wickedness; but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth. (Fl.)

The age of the apostles has sometimes been styled the golden age of Christianity. On many accounts it stands entitled to this high character. Then men became Christians, not because Christianity was the religion of the state, or because their predecessors were Christians, but from a conviction of its divine origin, truth, and excellence. Then they placed religion not in mere morality, or in the external observance of the institutions of Christianity, but in the renewing of the Holy Ghost.—Then the preachers of the gospel were alike eminent for piety, zeal, and gifts, workmen needing not to be ashamed. But even that age was not all gold;—there was some dross. False teachers crept in privily, and brought with them damnable doctrines. One of these, during the absence of St. Paul, had found his way into the Corinthian church. He preached another gospel. The demoralizing influence of such preaching was soon visible in the licentiousness of one of the members. The apostle ordered his excommunication, reminding them that vice is contaminating; “a little leaven leaveneth the whole lump.”—Here he alludes to the Jewish passover; *then* all leaven was to be removed from their houses; *here* all sin from our hearts. “Purge out there fore,” &c.

Our text teaches us three things.

I. THAT CHRIST CRUCIFIED IS THE TRUE PASSOVER, OF WHICH THE JEWISH WAS A TYPE. For an account of the Jewish passover read Exodus chap. xii. Several things here demand attention.

1. *The passover was of divine appointment.* It did not originate with Moses or Aaron, or any of the elders or people of Israel. It was not the offspring of human policy, but of God, ver. 1. So its antitype originated neither with angels nor men, but with God. It was neither in the *power* nor *wisdom* of man to devise and execute a plan, by which the divine attributes could be harmonized, and the sinner saved. But that which man could not do, God has done.

2. *The passover was appointed for the deliverance of the Israelites from bondage and death.* They were slaves, oppressed with labor, tormented with cruelty, Exodus i. 11—16. The Lord heard their cry, and stretched out his hand to save: so Christ's death was intended to deliver mankind from the slavery, guilt, love, pollution, and punishment of sin;—to lead from spiritual Egypt to the heavenly Jerusalem.

3. *The passover would benefit none unless the blood were applied,* ver. 7, and 13. So also the death of Christ will profit us nothing, unless through faith we become the personal subjects of its mystical application—*to our consciences*, “in purging them from dead works,” Heb. ix. 14,—*to our hearts*, in cleansing them from all sin, 1 John i. 7.

4. *The passover was not only to be slain, and its blood sprinkled, but it was also to be eaten;* see the eighth and following verses. So we must eat the flesh of the Son of God, John vi. 53.—Spiritual life is sustained by Christ—by furnishing the understanding with *instruction*, and *motives*—and by pouring grace into the heart to act upon the *will*—to raise the *affections*—to purify the *heart*—and to produce *power* to please God.—Christ is indeed our passover.

II. THAT AS THE FEAST OF THE PASSOVER WAS TO BE CELEBRATED BY THE JEWS, SO THE EUCHARIST OR LORD'S SUPPER IS TO BE CELEBRATED BY CHRISTIANS. The Jews were to celebrate it—all the Jews and proselytes, *Exod. xii. 47, 48*,—but none else, *verse 43*,—it was to be celebrated as long as their dispensation should continue, *verse 24*,—as a memorial of their deliverance from Egypt, *verse 27*.—So the Lord's Supper is to be celebrated by all Christians—all who receive Christ as their Lord and Master—who make his word the rule of their faith and practice—who propose his glory as the object of their desire—and who, deeply conscious of the deceitfulness and weakness of the human heart, rely continually and implicitly upon Christ for the promised aid of the Holy Spirit to enable them to *will* and to *do* of his good pleasure. Those who are not Christians have no right to it;—Christ appointed it for his disciples only, *Luke xxii. 14, &c.*,—its being celebrated as a political test to qualify for civil offices is an awful profanation of the ordinance, and ranks among our national sins. But *all* Christians ought to celebrate it.

1. *Because Christ has commanded it*, *Luke xxii. 19*. Whatever he has commanded must be implicitly obeyed. To refuse obedience in any case because we do not perceive the necessity of the things enjoined, is totally to reject the authority of him who commands, and to make our obedience depend upon our perception of the fitness of the thing commanded.

2. *Because it keeps alive the important doctrine of salvation through the death of Christ*. The death of Christ is not to be viewed as an *ordinary* event—nor as the death of a martyr; but as a *propitiation* for sin, *Rom. iii. 25*. Our Lord's words perfectly agree with this view, and explicitly teach this doctrine. So long as this rite is performed, so long will the doctrine of Christ's sacrificial death be received in the church.

3. *Because it eminently tends to excite holy affections*.—*Godly sorrow*, arising from a conviction that our sins, in common with those of others, occasioned the sufferings and death of Christ, *Ardent love to Christ*.—Love begets love; remember its greatness as manifested in his incarnation—preaching—labor—suffering—death—resurrection—intercession—gift of the Holy Ghost—and all the blessings of the Christian dispensation. *Grateful obedience*.—Love is a constraining principle, it delights in doing the *will*—and copying the *example* of him whom we love. As the passover was to be an ordinance to the Jews forever, so the Lord's Supper is to be perpetuated in the Christian church to the end of time, *1 Cor. xi. 26*

III. THAT IN ORDER TO ITS ACCEPTABLE CELEBRATION SEVERAL THINGS DEMAND ATTENTION.

1. *We should have correct views of its nature*. A fondness for mystery has led the Romish and Greek churches to interpret literally, what can only be metaphorically understood. Hence the absurd doctrine of *transubstantiation*. Neither the body nor blood of Christ is any more in the Lord's Supper, than the body and blood of the paschal lamb slain in Egypt in the time of Moses, was in the passover celebrated by our Lord and his apostles in Jerusalem.—In both cases the ordinances are merely *commemorative rites*.

2. *We should not ascribe an efficacy to it which it does not possess*. Many substitute it in the place of regeneration.—Hence the vilest debauchee, when he thinks himself dying, sends for a minister to come and give him the sacrament—having received it, he concludes his peace is made with God, and in this horrible delusion expires. Ministers should never administer it

to any person without explaining its nature, and showing that it is *not a Saviour*, but, like prayer, and hearing the gospel, a *means of salvation*.

3. *We should celebrate it with suitable dispositions. Not with malice.* For here we commemorate not malice but love—love to the worthless—love to enemies—love, where wrath and indignation had been merited. *Not with wickedness.*—For here we read God's aversion to wickedness of every kind—his method of removing it,—and our obligation to universal holiness. *But with sincerity and truth*—with purity of intention—and with an agreement between our principles and outward profession.

Conclude by answering a few objections.

I dare not keep the feast, for it is a solemn ordinance.—For the same reason you should neither pray—read the Scriptures—sing God's praises—nor hear his gospel preached; for they are all solemn.

2. *I am not prepared to receive it.* If you have not made up your mind to forsake sin, dare not to approach the table; but if you are resolved to be the servant of Christ, draw near.

3. *I have kept the feast formerly, but since then I have relapsed into sin.* Let this humble you, but let it no more hinder you from coming to the table, than from approaching the throne of grace.

THE APOSTLES' COMMISSION.

Matt. xxxviii. 18—20.—And Jesus came, and spake unto them, saying, All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth, go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost; teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and lo, I am with you *always*, even unto the end of the world. Amen. (S. S.)

THE apostles spoke and wrote in a most authoritative manner—
They issued commands, promises and threats, in the name of God.
We therefore naturally enquire, by what authority they acted—
The passage before us gives a most satisfactory account—
In these words of our Lord we observe,

I. THE AUTHORITY HE CLAIMED.

Jesus, as God, possessed all power equally with the Father—

But, as Mediator, he received his power from the Father—

He received it, partly, that by means of it he might execute his mediatorial office. John xvii. 2.—

And, partly, as a reward for executing it. Phil. ii. 8—11.—

This power extended over heaven and earth.

Less than this would not have sufficed for the ends for which it was given—

But by this he is enabled to overrule every thing for the accomplishment of his own purpose—

Nor is it at all diminished by the lapse of ages.

It shall indeed cease to act at the last day. 1 Cor. xv. 28.—

There will not then be any occasion for the exercise of it.—

But till all the members of the church be glorified, Jesus will exert this power for their good—

And his authority will be the hope and consolation of them all—

It was upon this that he founded,

II. THE COMMISSION HE GAVE TO HIS APOSTLES.

He had formerly sent them to instruct the Jews—

He now extends their commission to the gentiles—

They were to *teach* all nations.

As they were to baptize men in the name of the sacred **THREE**, no doubt they were first to make known the persons and offices of the holy Trinity—

They were to declare “the Father,” as our offended, but reconciled God and Father—

They were to make known “the Son,” as the sinner’s advocate and propitiation—

They were to set forth “the Holy Ghost,” as the enlightener, comforter, and sanctifier of God’s elect—

They were to *baptize* their converts in the name of the sacred Three.

Having proselyted men to the Christian faith, they were to initiate them into covenant with God by baptism—

But though they first taught adults, and then baptized them, they reversed this order with respect to infants—

They took care, however, that in all cases the doctrine they preached should be recorded in the baptismal rite—

And that every christian should either expressly or virtually acknowledge it—

They were also to *instruct* their hearers in *practical religion*.

It is evident they were not to be *merely* moral preachers—

They must of necessity insist much on the offices of the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost—

But they were also to inculcate every moral duty—

And to enforce every obligation whether toward God or man—

This commission was arduous—We proceed to notice,

III. THE PROMISE HE ADDED FOR THEIR ENCOURAGEMENT.

The Apostles might well have been discouraged from attempting to execute so difficult a service.

They were, in themselves, poor, mean, and illiterate—

They had to propagate principles new, strange, detested—

————— to oppose the lusts and prejudices of mankind—

————— to bring men from sin to a life of holiness and self-denial—

And this, not only without human aid, but in opposition to all the power and policy of the world—

They could not therefore but feel themselves unfit for such a task—

But our Lord gave them a most encouraging promise.

When Moses declined the service to which he was called, God promised to be with him, *Exod. iv. 15*—

Thus Christ engaged to succor his disciples in their work—

He assured them of his presence to direct, assist, and uphold them

And to give effect to their labours—

To this promise he called their particular attention; “*lo*”—

Nor will he fail to accomplish it to the end of the world—

Nor was the affirmation added to it without peculiar energy,

“*Amen*” may be considered as an affirmation or a petition—

In either view it should not be overlooked—

The promise it confirms was the solace of all the Apostles—

And has been the support of all succeeding pastors—

Let every one then add "Amen," as importing both his wish and
affiance—

INFER

1. How clearly is the doctrine of the Trinity revealed!

The Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, are here distinctly mentioned—

They are all mentioned *in the same manner*, and *for the same end*—

Whatsoever is meant by "the name" of the Father, must be understood
also in reference to the Son and Holy Ghost—

And the baptizing of persons in their name must be considered as the
most solemn act of worship to them—

Let none then doubt the truth or importance of this doctrine—

Let every one rather be daily worshipping the sacred Three—

And looking to them to perform their respective offices—

2. How highly should we value the ordinances of religion!

Many excuse themselves from attending on public ordinances, by saying,
that they are equally profited at home—

But the converting and edifying of souls is the appointed labor of Christ's
ministers—

And Christ has promised his special presence with them—

It must therefore be the duty of all to attend on their ministrations—

Let us then reverence his institutes, and seek his blessing—

Thousands yet daily experience the truth of his promise—

The poor, the weak, the desponding, are enriched, strengthened, com-
forted—

Nor shall any that truly hunger be ever sent away empty.

CHAPTER II.

EXHORTATIONS.

AN INVITATION TO PARTAKE OF GOSPEL BLESSINGS.

Isaiah iv. 1, 2.—Ho, every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters, and he that hath no
money: come ye, buy and, eat; yea, come, buy wine and milk without money,
and without price. Wherefore do ye spend money for that which is not bread? and
your labor for that which satisfieth not? hearken diligently unto me, and eat ye that
which is good, and let your soul delight itself in fatness. (B.)

In the text, we have a most encouraging invitation to us Gentiles. Con-
sider we,

I. TO WHOM THE INVITATION IS MADE.

"Ho every one that thirsteth,"—"and he that hath no money."—

Those who *thirst* are invited. Thirst implies want, and, therefore, the
needy are invited; all who need happiness. We naturally seek it in present
things, in carnal pleasure, or worldly honor and wealth; but these things
neither do nor can afford it.

Thirsty persons are sensible, keenly sensible, of their wants. Hence,
those are especially invited, who are sensible of their need of these things.—

Those who are thirsty feel a desire for refreshing draughts; a strong, con-
stant and increasing desire. Such, therefore, are particularly welcome.—

The thirsty are uneasy, distressed, and restless till they drink, and can be satisfied with nothing else. So those who are uneasy, unhappy, and restless to obtain pardon, the divine favor, a birth from above, and the sanctifying influences of the Spirit, and will be satisfied with nothing else, that is, the "weary and heavy laden," are still more particularly called.

The thirsty are active, and will take pains to gain refreshment. These are most of all invited.

But suppose they be very guilty, and have lived in the neglect of all their duties to God and man, and the commission of all kinds of sins?—still, they are welcome. Those, who have *no money*, no good works, no righteousness, if they only thirst, shall be welcome.

II. WHAT IT IMPLIES, OR THE NATURE OF THE INVITATION.

"Come to the waters." This may be interpreted, "Come to the keys, wharfs, and ports, on navigable rivers, where foreign commodities are imported.—"

Buy what you absolutely want. Buy what is of infinite value,—pardon, of your sins, acceptance with God, adoption, regeneration, &c. Buy what will do you infinite good, will remove all your miseries, and make you happy, truly, continually, and lastingly happy; what will enrich you, elevate your nature in the highest degree, and make you most glorious. Buy an estate, an inheritance, a kingdom, a crown.

Come and buy for nothing, "without money and without price." The blessings offered to you are invaluable; no price can be set upon them.

"Their value vast ungrasp'd by minds create."

We are indeed, poor, and have nothing, but the blessings are already bought and paid for.—We may have them gratis, as free undeserved gifts.—And yet they shall be as much our own, as if bought and paid for by us.

Buy very cheap. You must part with clay, thick clay, that defiles, burdens, and destroys—the world, and sin. You must part with poison, and buy food; you must part with rags, and buy costly and splendid clothing; you must part with chains, and buy crowns; you must part with disorders and death, and buy health and immortality. Again,

Come to the waters and wash. Come, ye filthy; ye that are defiled with guilt, come to the "fountain opened for sin and uncleanness;" ye that are defiled with the power and pollution, the ulcers and leprosy of sin, come and receive the Spirit of God, the washing of regeneration.

Come to the waters and drink. Ye thirsty; come, and be refreshed with peace with God; peace of mind, and the consolations of God's Spirit; in "the times of refreshing from his presence." Come, ye weary, and "I will give you rest."

Come and be healed. These are medicinal waters. The blood of Christ, the Spirit of God, the word of God, the waters of the sanctuary, are intended for the cure of spiritual diseases.

Come and be quickened, and made immortal. These are *waters of life*. Drink of them, and live; yea, live for ever.

Fear not lest you should drink the waters dry. They shall increase continually, and impart their salutary effects to all who use them. (See Ezek. xlvii. 1—12.)

The waters when you shall drink of them, shall become "milk;" sweet, balmy, and nourishing. Such are the truths and promises of the Gospel; such the grace and love of God in Jesus Christ.

The "milk" shall become "wine," cheering, invigorating, strengthening. Gospel truths and promises, God's grace and love shall be productive of hope, joy, and strong consolation.

It is not enough that we come and look at the blessings which are offered, we must partake of them. We must *buy* them; they must be ours. We must *eat* them: applying them, in their several particulars, for our own use and benefit. But how? By faith. We must hear; hearken diligently." Come, not only to the ordinances, but "unto me," by faith in prayer.

III. THE ARGUMENTS WHEREBY THE INVITATION IS ENFORCED.

"Wherefore do ye spend money for that which is not bread, and your labor for that which satisfieth not?"

The rich live by their money, and the poor by labor. Both are gone out of the way of truth and happiness. The things which men pursue, the riches, honors, and pleasures of this world are not *bread*, they are not the proper food of the soul, are not suited to its nature, are not calculated to fill its capacity, and supply its wants; to refresh it, to restore its wasted strength, to preserve its health, to nourish and make it grow. They do not invigorate, strengthen, or improve it.—

Neither do these things *satisfy* us. They do not even at present; but if they did, we have no hold upon them; they are perfectly uncertain, and will certainly leave us, when we shall be in greatest need of consolation.

Wherefore, then, do ye follow after these things? Is it reasonable? Is it wise? Is it for your honor? Is it for your interest? Is it your duty? Quite the reverse. — Is it necessary? Cannot you do otherwise? Yes; the grace of God is sufficient for you, and free for you.

But, do you object, we have nothing better to pursue, and must be active. Not so. Come unto me, and your soul shall live; shall be quickened, in the possession of the favor of God, a union with him, his image, his nature, fellowship with him, holiness inward and outward, happiness present and eternal, according to an everlasting covenant.

Wherefore, "Ho, every one that thirsteth," all of you in general, and every one in particular, "come ye to the waters," &c. —

GOD IS DESIROUS OF SAVING MEN.

Jer. xiii. 27.—Woe unto thee, O Jerusalem! Wilt thou not be made clean? When shall it once be? (H. H.)

THROUGHOUT all the sacred writings we behold the goodness and severity of God: sometimes the one attracts our notice, and sometimes the other; and in many places, as in that before us, we are both struck with the union and combination of them both. Jerusalem was the city of the living God, the residence of his peculiar people; yet he denounces woe against them: but at the same time he declares, in very pathetic language, the ardent desires of his soul to exercise mercy towards them.

From these most affecting words we shall take occasion to shew,

I. THE WOES WHICH IMPENITENT SINNERS HAVE REASON TO EXPECT—

This is a painful, but necessary, subject of our inquiries—

The punishment that awaits sinners in most tremendous—

The loss of heaven is one part of it: and who shall declare how great a loss this is? — — — The miseries of hell (which is the other part) are equally beyond the powers of language to describe, or of imagination to conceive — — —

This, however, the impenitent have but too much reason to expect —

“Woe unto thee!” says my text: and this is the voice of reason* — — — of scripture† — — — of experience‡ — — — of the compassionate Saviour himself|| — — — What stronger evidence can any man wish for? and how blind must he be that is not convinced by it!

But however merited and awful these woes, are, we see from the text,

II. HOW UNWILLING GOD IS TO INFLICT THEM —

He complains of men’s obstinacy in rejecting the overtures of his mercy —

It is their sin only that exposes them to his displeasure: were that once removed, he would “rejoice over them to do them good.” And whence is it that they are not cleansed from it? Has not God provided such means for their cleansing, as should certainly be effectual, if only they were applied? Has he not opened a fountain to cleanse them from guilt? Zech. xiii. 1; 1 John i. 7, — — — Has he not promised to sprinkle them with water that should purify and renew their very inmost souls? Ezek. xxxvi. 25—27, — — — Yes: but they are averse to that purification: they hate the very means by which it is to be attained, and the regimen whereby it is to be preserved — — — God would gladly effect the work for them, if only they would submit to it; but they will not. Ezek. xxxiii. 11. Hence those complaints so often uttered by the prophets, Ps. lxxxi. 11—13; Jer. vii. 23—26, and by Christ himself — — — John v. 40; Matt. xxiii. 37.

He expresses also an impatient longing for an opportunity to bless their souls —

Long has he waited to no purpose: yet still “he waiteth to be gracious unto us:” “he stands at the door of our hearts, and knocks.” His address to us is, “Turn ye, turn ye from your evil ways; for why will ye die, O house of Israel?” Every day appears to him an age: Hos. viii. 5; Jer. xv. 6. “I am weary with repenting;” he is at a loss, as it were, what to do, whether to give us up, or to use any further means. Hos. vi. 4, and xi. 8; Jer. iii. 4, 19. The complaint in the text is scarcely less the language of despondency, than of compassion; “When shall it once be?” It is as though he said, “My patience is almost exhausted: your return to me is the most earnest desire of my soul: but I fear I shall be forced, in spite of all my efforts to save you, to abandon you at last, and to execute the judgments which you so obstinately provoke.”

ADDRESS,

1. Those who imagine that they have no need of cleansing —

What child of man has not need to be cleansed from that taint which we inherit from our first parents? Job xiv. 4, and xv. 14, and xxv. 4. And who has not contracted much moral defilement by means of actual transgression? — — — Let none entertain such proud conceits. The best amongst

* There must be a difference between the righteous and the wicked.

† Against ten thousand passages to this effect, there is not one syllable that has an opposite aspect.

‡ The union of sin and misery is felt by all. Where is there a sinner that is truly happy? See Isaiah lvii. 20, 21.

|| See how often woe is denounced, Matt. xxiii. 13, 14, 15, 16, 23, 25, 27, 29, &c.

us, no less than the worst, need to be washed in the blood of Christ and be renewed by his Spirit; and without this cleansing, must inevitably perish.

2. Those who are unwilling to be cleansed—

Many are unwilling to part with even the grossest lusts. What then must we say to them? Must we speak peace to them, instead of denouncing woes? If we were to do so, God would not confirm our word: so that we should only delude them to their ruin. But indeed they themselves would not be deluded by any such assertions: for, with whatever confidence they utter them themselves, they would not endure to hear them if uttered from the pulpit.

But it is not gross sin only that must be put away: we must be “cleansed also from secret faults:” whatever stops short of this, is ineffectual. The right hand, the right eye, must be sacrificed; and the whole heart be turned unto God— — —

3. Those who desire the cleansing of their souls—

It is of infinite importance that you seek this blessing aright. It is not in floods of tears that you are to be cleansed; though floods of tears are proper and desirable: it is the blood of Christ alone that can cleanse from the guilt of sin; and the Spirit of Christ alone that can cleanse from the power and pollution of sin. To apply these effectually, we must embrace the promises, and rest upon them, trusting in God to accomplish them to our souls. We must not first cleanse ourselves, and then embrace God’s promises of mercy; but first lay hold on the promises, and then, by virtue derived from them, proceed to “cleanse ourselves from all filthiness both of flesh and spirit.” 2 Cor. vii. 1, with Acts xv. 9.

INVITATION TO COME TO CHRIST.

Rev. xxii. 17.—And the Spirit and the Bride say, Come: and let him that heareth say, Come: and let him that is athirst, come: and whosoever will, let him take of the water of life freely. (H. H.)

RICH beyond expression are the blessings held forth to us in the Word of Life: and as free as light are the invitations given us to partake of them. Not only in the epistles to the Seven Churches, and in the other parts of this prophetic book, but throughout the whole scriptures, is every possible encouragement afforded to the sinners of mankind, to repent of sin, and to “lay hold upon the hope that is set before them” in the gospel. And here, in the close of the inspired volume, are invitations to us reiterated from every quarter, that we may be prevailed upon to accept of mercy, ere the door of mercy be for ever closed.

Let us consider,

I. THE BLESSINGS TO WHICH WE ARE INVITED—

They are here designated by “the water of life.” We will notice them,

1. Generally—

The source from whence this water flows, is no other than the Lord Jesus Christ, the Saviour of the world. In the very chapter before us, “the pure river of the water of life” is said to “proceed out of the throne of God and of the Lamb.” Ver. 1. As in the wilderness, the water gushing from the rock that had been smitten supplied the necessities of all Israel; so the Lord

Jesus Christ, when smitten with the rod of the law, poured forth the waters of salvation for the benefit of the whole world. 1 Cor. x. 4. He is "the fountain of living waters;" Jer. ii. 13; and whosoever cometh to him, may drink and live for ever. In the chapter before our text, the Lord Jesus Christ declared this to the apostle John: "I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end. I will give to him that is athirst of the fountain of the water of life freely." Ch. xxi. 6. In the days of his flesh, he spoke repeatedly to this effect. To the Samaritan woman, of whom he had asked a draught of water, he said, "If thou knewest the gift of God, and who it is that saith unto thee, Give me to drink, thou wouldest have asked of him, and he would have given thee living water." John iv. 10. On another occasion, when the people had, according to custom, drawn water from the pool of Siloam, he stood in the place of public concourse, and cried, "If any man thirst, let him come unto me and drink: and out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water." This latter expression is then explained by the Evangelist, who adds, "This spake He of the Spirit, which they that believe on him should receive." John vii. 37-39. Now here we have, *in a general view*, the import of the expression in my text. The Holy Spirit is that water of life which Christ is empowered to bestow: and wherever that blessed Spirit is imparted, there is within the person's own bosom a principle of life, seeking for vent in all suitable expressions of duty to God; or, as our Lord elsewhere expresses it, "there is within him a well of water springing up unto everlasting life;" John iv. 14; to which the Holy Spirit, in all his tendencies and operations, leads us to aspire.

2. More particularly—

Three blessings in particular I will specify, as granted by our Lord Jesus Christ unto all who come unto him; namely, *pardon*, and *holiness*, and *glory*.

The Lord Jesus will in the first place bestow the *pardon* of our sins. He is said by the prophet to be "the Fountain opened for sin and for uncleanness;" Zech. xiii. 1; and all who come to wash in that fountain are cleansed from all their sins. In it even "sins of a crimson dye" are made "white as snow;" Isa. i. 18; as it is said, "The blood of Jesus Christ cleanseth from all sin." 1 John i. 7.

For the purposes of *sanctification* also shall this gift be bestowed: for, by the prophet Ezekiel, he says, "I will sprinkle clean water upon you, and ye shall be clean: from all your filthiness and from all your idols will I cleanse you. And I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes, and to keep my judgments to do them." Ezek. xxxvi. 25-27.

Eternal *glory* also will he confer upon them: for, when they have "washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb, he will lead them unto living fountains of waters," Rev. vii. 14, 16, and will cause them to "drink of the rivers of pleasure which are at God's right hand for evermore." Ps. xxxvi. 8, and xvi. 11.

Let us now turn our attention to,

H. THE INVITATION ITSELF—

Here we cannot but notice the very peculiar urgency and freeness of it—

1. The urgency, to overcome reluctance—

"The Spirit says, Come." The Holy Spirit of God has undertaken the office of revealing Christ to men, and of bringing sinners to Christ for the remission of their sins. John xvi. 8, 14. He descended visibly on the day of Pentecost for these ends; and by the ministry of the apostles, as also by his operation on the souls of men, wrought powerfully upon multitudes.

whom he "made willing in the day of his power," and effectually subdued to the obedience of faith. Thus at this time also is he carrying on the work that has been assigned him in the economy of Redemption. In the written word, he speaks to us: by the ministry of his servants, he pleads with us: by the convictions which he fastens on our mind and conscience, he strives with us individually; if by any means he may constrain us to accept the blessings offered to us in the gospel. His voice to us every day and hour is, "Come," come to Christ as the Saviour of your soul.

"The Bride also says, Come." The Bride is the church, "the Lamb's wife," who has experienced in her own person all the blessedness of that salvation which she is so desirous of imparting to all around her. The church of old addressed her Lord, saying, "Draw *me*, and we will run after thee;" Cant. i. 4; that is, "Draw *me*, and I will not come alone: I will surely labor to the utmost of my power to make known to others the wonders of thy love, that they also may be partakers of my felicity, and unite with me in honoring and adoring thee." Thus the church does in every age. She is "the pillar and ground of the truth," 1 Tim. iii. 15, supporting it firmly in the world, and exhibiting, as by public inscriptions that are visible to all, the glory and excellency of the gospel salvation. She then unites with the Spirit of God in saying to all around her, "Come." Come to Jesus and see what a Saviour he is. See in *me* what he both can and will do for you also; however far off you may now be, you may draw nigh to him with a full assurance of acceptance with him; and though now "aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers from the covenants of promise, you may become fellow-citizens with the saints and of the household of God." Eph. ii. 19.

"Let him also that heareth, say, Come." Those to whom the foregoing invitations are announced, should unite their efforts to make them known, and to induce every creature under heaven to accept them. Think not, brethren, that you have performed your duty when you have heard these invitations from the lips of your minister; no, nor when you have yourselves complied with his advice. You are all to be preachers in your own circles; all to repeat to your friends and relatives, your families and dependents, the glad tidings which you hear of a free and full salvation; and, with one heart and one voice, should join in saying to all around you, "Come, come, come." This was the conduct of Andrew and of Philip, when they had found the Saviour; John i. 40, 41, 43, 45; and this must be the conduct of us all, in our respective spheres.

2. The freeness, to counteract despondency—

"We are all invited to "take of the water of life freely." If we are "athirst," we are the very persons whose names, if I may so speak, are especially written on the cards of invitation. Indeed, if our names had been expressly recorded in this passage, we should not have had a thousandth part of the assurance of God's willingness to accept us that we now have; for there might be other persons of our name: but no mourning penitent in the universe can err in tracing his name in the designation that is here given.

It may be, however, that some may say, "I am not sufficiently athirst to be able to appropriate to myself this character. I should be glad indeed to obtain mercy of the Lord; but I do not pant after it as the hart after the water-brooks, and therefore I have not in myself the qualification that is here required." To counteract such desponding fears, the Saviour says, "*Who-soever will*, let him take of the water of life freely." If you have not all the *thirst* that you can wish, have you the *inclination*? have you the *desire*?

Then you are the person invited : and you must not dream of staying till you can bring certain qualifications along with you, but come and take these blessings "*freely*, without money and without price." Isa. lv. 1.

To impress this subject the more deeply on your minds, let me ADDRESS a few words,

1. To the reluctant—

Many are the excuses which you urge for your declining the invitation sent you in the gospel : and to you they appear perhaps sufficient to justify your refusal. But your Lord and Saviour will not be deceived : he sees the radical indisposition of your mind to the blessings which he offers you ; and will say of you, as he did in reference to those of old, "They shall never taste of my supper." Luke xiv. 16-24. You may be offering a variety of pleas : but he will put the true construction on them all, "*Ye will not come unto me that ye may have life.*" John v. 40. O think, how bitterly you will regret your present conduct, when you shall see unnumbered myriads, who were once as far off from him as you now are, sitting down at the marriage supper of the Lamb, and you yourselves be cast out into outer darkness ! What weeping, and wailing, and gnashing of teeth will you then experience to all eternity ! Matt. viii. 11, 12. How will those words sound in your ears at the last day, "Often would I have gathered thee, as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings ; but ye would not !" Matt. xxiii. 37. Do but reflect on this one moment,—"*I would ; and ye would not.*" Verily, that reflection will constitute the very summit of your misery in hell. I pray you, hold not out any longer against the urgent invitations which are now sent you ; but come unto the Saviour, and accept the rest which he has promised to all that are weary and heavy-laden.

2. To the desponding—

What can the Saviour add to convince you of his willingness to accept and bless you ? Perhaps you will say, "I have tried to come to him, and I cannot : and I have tried so long, that I think it in vain to entertain a hope of final success." Is this the case ? Then hear what the Saviour says to you by the prophet Isaiah : When the poor and needy seek water, and there is none, and their tongue faileth for thirst, I the Lord will hear them, I the God of Israel will not forsake them : I will open rivers in high places, and fountains in the midst of the valleys : I will make the wilderness a pool of water, and the dry land springs of water. Isa. xli. 17, 18. Now I cannot conceive a case more desperate than that which is here depicted : The person is in himself "poor and needy." (There you will easily recognize your own character.) He has "sought for water," even for the waters of salvation. (That represents what you also profess to have done.) He has "found none." (There is your unhappy lot painted with the utmost precision.) "His tongue faileth for thirst ;" so that he is ready to sink in utter despair. (What can you add to that, to bring it home more fully to your own case ?) Yet this is *the very person for whom God has reserved his blessings, and to whom he engages to impart them.* "But I am in such a state, that it is almost impossible to deliver me : you might as well expect a river to be running over the highest mountains, as for the waters of salvation to reach me." Is that the case ? says the Saviour : then "*I will open rivers in high places ;* I will make the wilderness a pool of water, and the dry land springs of water." See here, my brethren, what wonderful condescension there is in your Lord and Saviour, that he will so describe your case, that it should not be possible for you to fail in recognizing your own character, or to doubt any longer his ability and willingness to save you. Take then this

passage; and rely upon it; and plead it with him; and expect the accomplishment of it to your own soul. Then shall "your light rise in obscurity, and your darkness be as the noon-day." Isa. lviii. 10. You shall find that the Saviour is not "a fountain sealed," Cant. iv. 12, but "a fountain opened;" Psa. xxxvi. 9; Joel iii. 18; and "out of that well of salvation you shall drink water with joy" for evermore. Isa. xii. 3.

EXHORTATION TO A HOLY WALK.

Isaiah ii. 5.—O house of Jacob, come ye, and let us walk in the light of the Lord. (H. H.)

MANY prophecies there are which are not yet accomplished, especially among those which are to be fulfilled "in the last days," The last days were understood even by the Jews themselves as relating to the days of the Messiah; and they comprehend all the time from his first advent in the flesh, to the period when his kingdom shall be fully established upon earth. Hence the prophecies relating to that period must have different degrees of accomplishment; being partly fulfilled in the first triumphs of the gospel, but having a further and more entire accomplishment when all the kingdoms of the world shall become the kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. Thus it is that we are to understand the prophecy contained in the preceding context. "The mountain of the Lord's house," that is, the gospel church, was established on the top of the mountains in the apostolic age, when it triumphed over heathen idolatry and Jewish superstition; and myriads of converts encouraged one another to serve and glorify their God: but we have not yet seen the time when "swords have been beaten into ploughshares, and spears into pruning-hooks, and nations have ceased to learn and practice the art of war." That time however will come; and we should long, and labor to the utmost of our power, to hasten it forward. We should even now anticipate it; yea, we *will* anticipate it: "O house of Jacob, come ye, and let us walk in the light of the Lord!"

Let us walk in the light

I. OF HIS TRUTH—

His truth now shines in its meridian splendor—

"The darkness is indeed past; and the true light now shineth." 1 John ii. 8. "The day-star has arisen," 2 Pet. i. 19; "the day-spring from on high hath visited us," Luke i. 78, 79; "the Sun of righteousness," Mal. iv. 2; shineth forth in his brightness: and the way of salvation through a crucified Redeemer is now so plain, "that no wayfaring man though a fool can err therein." Isa. xxxv. 8. ——— "On the face of Moses there was a veil, that they who received the law should not see its full import: but if the gospel be hid, it is from those only whom the god of this world hath blinded;" since "we may all with open (that is, *unveiled*) face behold as in a mirror the glory of the Lord." 2 Cor. iii. 13—18. ———

Let us then walk in it—

Having the light, we should "believe in the light, that we may be the children of light." John xii. 35. 36. We should embrace with all thankfulness the way of salvation revealed in the gospel. We should "*come to Christ*" as the appointed Saviour of a ruined world: Matt. xi. 28; we

should "*look to him*," as dying upon the cross for us: Isa. xlv. 22; we should "*build upon him*," as our only foundation;" 1 Cor. iii. 11; and "*cleave unto him* with full purpose of heart;" Acts xi. 23; and "*determine to know none but him*;" 1 Cor. ii. 2; and to "*glory in nothing but the cross of Christ*;" Gal. vi. 14; — — — "*Arise then, and be enlightened*, for the light is come; and the glory of the Lord is risen upon you." Isa. lx. 1. *The marginal reading.*

Whilst confiding in God as reconciled to us by the blood of the cross, we should endeavor to walk in the light,

II. OF HIS COUNTENANCE—

This is the privilege of a true believer—

So it is declared to be, by one who experienced it richly in his own soul. Ps. lxxxix. 15. God presents himself to us in the gospel under the endearing relations of a father and a friend, to whom we may carry every want, every trial, every difficulty; and from whom we may expect a supply according to our need. He will be not only "*our God*," but "*a God unto us*," 1 Chron. xvii. 24. Putting forth all his wisdom, all his love, and all his power, to make us truly blessed. He will engage in this work "*with his whole heart and with his whole soul*;" Jer. xxxii. 41; so that it must be utterly our own fault if we be not as holy, and as happy, as our hearts can wish. — — —

Let us then enjoy our privilege—

Let us "*walk with God*," as Enoch did; and "*glory in him as the God of our salvation*." See what holy joy David found in communion with him, Ps. lxiii. 1—5, and cxlv. 1—12, and cl. — — — and shall we who live under a so much nobler dispensation experience less? Shall not *we*, who have so much clearer views of Christ, "*rejoice in him with joy unspeakable and glorified*?" O let us "*delight ourselves in God*," and have even now, "*in the secret of his presence*" and the consolations of his Spirit, an earnest and a foretaste of our heavenly inheritance. Ps. xxxi. 20. Eph. i. 13, 14. — — —

But we shall in vain hope to enjoy his presence, if we walk not also in the light,

III. OF HIS COMMANDMENTS—

These are given by him "*as a light to our feet and a lantern to our paths*."—

Without them we should not "*know how to walk and to please God*;" but by them we are fully informed in all things that are needful for us to do. Prov. vi. 23. They do not indeed descend to every particular circumstance in which we can be placed; but they afford principles which are universally applicable, and which are quite sufficient for our direction when duly applied. The duty "*of doing to others as we would be done unto*," is so comprehensive as to embrace every part of our social duty, whilst it is so simple that it may be comprehended and applied by every one who desires to please God.

Let us then make these the one rule of our conduct—

Let us not attempt to reduce them to the standard of the world, but endeavor rather to raise our conduct to the standard of God's revealed will. Let us treasure up in our minds the most exalted precepts, and "*hide God's word in our hearts, that we may not sin against him*;" for "*then shall we not be ashamed, when we have respect unto all God's commandments* — — —

In ADDRESSING "*the house of Jacob*," we must speak to,

1. Those who are nominally so—

It is but too true, that "all are not Israel, who are of Israel:" and those who are only of the house of Jacob by name and profession, may know it by their walk and conversation. Consider, I pray you, in what light you have walked: Is it not manifest, that the generality who call themselves christians are influenced only by the things of time and sense; and that their principles and pursuits are altogether earthly? Know then, ye lovers of this present evil world, that, if God's word may be depended on, you are deluding yourselves to eternal ruin. Isa. l. 11. You "sow the wind and you shall reap the whirlwind. Hos. viii. 7. When will you begin to see, that "one thing," and one thing only, "is needful?" When will you learn to say, "Whom have I in heaven but thee? and there is none upon earth that I desire in comparison of thee?" That you should seek present as well as eternal happiness, we grant: but you should seek it where David did; "Who will shew us any good? Lord, lift thou up the light of thy countenance upon us; and that will put more gladness in my heart than any in crease of corn, wine, and oil can ever do." Ps. iv. 6, 7.

2. Those who are really so—

You have found that God in Christ is "a fountain of life; and in his light you have seen light." Ps. xxxvi. 9. You therefore are "children of the light and of the day." But if you are so highly distinguished in your character, think how distinguished you should also be in your conduct. Eph. v. 8. 1 Thess. v. 5. 6. The eyes of all are upon you: they will look particularly to see whether religion is such a source of happiness, as you profess. O shew them that "you need neither the sun to lighten you by day, nor the moon by night, since the Lord has been a light unto you, and your God your glory." Isa. lx. 19. Shew them that even in the greatest troubles you have a fountain of consolation to go unto: and that "when you walk in darkness, the Lord is a light unto you." Job xxix. 3. Mic. vii. 8. And, as it is eminently characteristic of Gospel times to encourage one another in the ways of God, see that you do so, "speaking one with another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your hearts unto the Lord." Then, from enjoying God in his courts below, you shall be taken to serve him in his temple above, where your largest desires shall be satisfied, and your utmost capacities be filled Rev. xxi. 22, 23. Ps. xvi. 11.

DAVID'S ADVICE TO SOLOMON.

1 Chron. xxviii. 9. And thou, Solomon my son, know thou the God of thy father, and serve him with a perfect heart, and with a willing mind: for the Lord searcheth all hearts, and understandeth all the imaginations of the thoughts: if thou seek him, he will be found of thee; but if thou forsake him, he will cast thee off forever. (H. H.)

WHATEVER may have been their own conduct through life, it is the wish of most men in a dying hour, that their children should walk in the ways of probity and honor. But men of piety have higher views: they wish their children not merely to pass through this world with credit, but to obtain happiness beyond the grave.—The advice of David in the words before us, is precisely such as every religious parent would wish to give to his surviving family. Let us observe,

I. THE ADVICE HERE GIVEN—

The occasion was most solemn. David had desired to build a temple for the Lord, but was forbidden; and was directed to devolve that office on his son Solomon. All the princes and great men of the nation were convened to assist at the solemnity: and in the presence of them all did David direct his son,

1. Whom to seek—

The terms here used have doubtless a peculiar force. David does not say to his son, “Know thou the God of *Israel*”; but “Know thou the God of *thy father*,” by which expression he evidently called the attention of Solomon to the character of Jehovah as exemplified in all his dealings towards *him*: it is as though he had said, “Know thou that *sovereign* God, who chose me above all to rule his people Israel ——— Know that *almighty* God who, in all my dangers from Saul or other enemies, has preserved me to the present hour ——— Know that *merciful* God who forgave me all my great transgressions in the matter of Uriah ——— and that *faithful* God who has fulfilled to me all his great and precious promises, in raising up thee to sit on my throne, and to build a temple to the Lord” ———

“*Know*” this God: study his character as displayed in all his conduct towards me: acquaint thyself with him in the most intimate and endearing manner: and seek him as thy friend, thy portion, thine eternal great reward! But remember that it is in Christ only that this character of God can be fully seen ——— Seek then to know God as reconciled to you in the Son of his love; and let “this God be your God for ever and ever.”

2. How to serve him—

Integrity of heart is indispensable in all who would serve their God aright. *Absolute* perfection is not to be expected by fallen man: but that measure of perfection which consists in a total freedom from all guile, not only may, but must, be attained. To be “Israelites indeed,” we must be “without guile.” There must be no lust, which we desire to retain; no duty, from which we draw back; no sacrifice which we are averse to make: the will of God, even his whole will, without any limitation or exception, must be that to which we aim to be conformed ——— And in our labors to fulfil our duty, we must not be constrained by slavish fear, but by filial love. We must feel the service of our God to be perfect freedom; and find all our delight in it, like the angels, who “do his will, hearkening to the voice of his word” ——— As we are to love our God, so also are we to serve him, “with all our heart, and mind, and soul, and strength.”

The importance of this charge is strongly marked in,

II. THE CONSIDERATIONS WITH WHICH IT IS ENFORCED—

Two arguments are here used to impress the more deeply on Solomon’s mind the foregoing exhortation. They are briefly these;

1. That God is privy to our inmost thoughts—

If God could judge only by the outward appearance, we might with less danger be inattentive to our hearts: but the heart of man is as visible to him as the sacrifices when flayed and divided asunder were to the priests of old. Heb. iv. 13, τετραχλισμῶνα. Not the thoughts only, but “the imaginations of the thoughts,” the very first risings of them before they are formed into a distinct apprehension of the mind, are all seen and marked by him, so as to ascertain with precision their nature and quality; and to make them infallible grounds of condemnation or acquittal in the day of judgment. Not actions only, but “the spirits of men are weighed by him,” so as to discern how

much there is of good or evil in every inclination, affection, appetite, and motion of the soul.

What a reason is this for attending to the frame of our minds in the service of our God! That, and that only which is according to his word, will be accepted by him: whatever there is of formality, or hypocrisy, or of any evil principle, will all be separated as chaff from the wheat, to be consumed in the fire, when the wheat is treasured up in his garner. Alas! how little that is truly good, will be found even in the best of men! Consider this; all ye who would find acceptance with God; and endeavor to approve yourselves to Him, "who searcheth the heart, and trieth the reins."

2. That he will deal with us according as we conduct ourselves towards him—

It is grievous that men should explain away the plainest declarations of God, in order to accommodate them to human systems. There is nothing clearer in all the inspired volume, than that "God will be found of them that seek him, and cast off those who forsake him." We appeal to the experience of all who are in the slightest degree acquainted with vital godliness. "Did God ever say to any man, Seek my face in vain?" — On the other hand, Who ever turned back from him, without suffering loss in his soul? Who has not found that the Spirit of God may be grieved and provoked to withdraw his gracious communications? Most assuredly he will not always strive with man, but will give us up to our hearts' lusts, if we wilfully harbor those dispositions or affections which are hateful in his sight. Moreover, in the eternal world, he will recompense every man exactly according to his works; adjudging to his diligent servants a reward proportioned to their diligence in improving their talents, and to the disobedient servants a punishment proportioned to their guilt.

Who can reflect on this, and not feel the force of the advice given in our text? Our happiness both in time and in eternity depends on our present diligence and fidelity. Let us therefore implore help from God, that we may so devote ourselves to him now, as to be approved by him in the day of judgment.

ADDRESS—

1. To parents—

You see in David, what should be your chief desire in behalf of your children. We say not that you should be indifferent about their worldly advancement; for that also is important in its place: but your great concern should be to have them truly pious and devoted to God. Labor then, by every possible means, to attain this point. Call them to you, and address them each by name with all tenderness and fidelity; remembering that you yourselves must answer unto God for the influence with which he has invested you for their good; and that, if they perish through your neglect, their blood will be required at your hands.

2. To those who are coming forth into life—

Such advice as that which is given in our text, you are ready to judge premature, or at least to think you have good reason for delaying your attention to it. But are you young, and moving in an elevated sphere, and engaging in concerns of vast importance? So was Solomon: yet were these no reasons for David to withhold the advice, or with Solomon to reject it. Remember, it is for eternity, and not for time only, that you should live; and, if you disregard the admonitions of your parents, they who now so long for your welfare, will be swift witnesses against you at the day of judgment.

3. To all who are here present—

It is not unbecoming a minister of Christ to regard his flock with parental solicitude, or to address them in the language of our text. Let me then address each of you, as it were, in the presence of the whole collective body, and urge you to seek after God with your whole hearts. Rest not in a formal routine of duties, or in a partial conformity to his revealed will: but see that your “hearts are right with him;” and never rest till you have “the witness of his Spirit,” and “the testimony of your own conscience, that in simplicity and godly sincerity you have your conversation in the world.” Such a state of mind is most desirable for every one of us; and it is the best preparative, no less for the duties of this life, than for the enjoyments of the life to come.

RELIGION IS NOT A SOURCE OF EVIL TO THOSE WHO EMBRACE IT.

Jer. xxv. 5, 6.—Turn ye now every one from his evil way, and from the evil of your doings, and I will do you no hurt.

SIN is the greatest of all evils; because it is the source from which all evils flow. Nor can the miseries which it has introduced be ever remedied, but by a thorough turning unto God. This, Jeremiah tells us, was the remedy prescribed by *all the prophets*: ver. 4, with the text: and certainly it is the only one that can ever prove effectual.

The passage from whence the text is taken, contains, in addition to the words which we have cited, a dehortation or dissuasion from idolatry; together with an intimation, that a continuance in that sin would accelerate their ruin, and insure their exclusion from the promised land: they would persist in it “*to their hurt*.” Ver. 7. On the contrary, if they would return to God, he would forbear to inflict upon them his threatened judgments, and “*do them no hurt*,”

But we omit that which related to the temporal state of the Jews, in order that we may fix your attention more immediately upon that part of the subject which is applicable to all persons in all ages of the world.

The text consists of,

I. AN EXHORTATION—

As idolatry was at that time the national sin of the Jews, so every one has some evil way to which he is more particularly addicted. We cannot pretend to trace all the shades of difference that are found in different men: we will rather arrange the whole under three great and comprehensive classes: to one or other of which, all, except true christians belong. We therefore say, ‘Turn.

1. From profaneness—

That this is a common sin amongst us, needs no proof; we cannot open our eyes or our ears but we must be speedily convinced of it. — — —

Let then as many of you as have entertained licentious principles, or indulged in vicious practices, “turn from the evil of your doings,” yea turn from it speedily, and with utter abhorrence.

2. From wordliness—

While the young and gay are rushing into vice, and pouring contempt upon every thing that is serious, a great part of mankind are immersed in

worldly cares; and as regardless of religion as their more dissipated brethren — — —

True it is, that these persons have more specious grounds on which to vindicate their conduct, inasmuch as it seems nearly allied to prudence and diligence. Still, however, while we highly approve of those virtues, we cannot but condemn a worldly spirit as evil: since it is declared to be incompatible with the love of God: 1 John ii. 15—17: and therefore we say to all, “Turn from it,” lest you deceive yourselves to your utter ruin.

3. From formality.

There is a very considerable number of persons, whose strictness of principle, and correctness of manners, screen them effectually against any charge of profaneness; while their indifference to riches and aggrandizement shews that they are not open, in any great degree, to the imputation of worldliness. But their religion consists in a mere round of duties, in which they have no real enjoyment of God, but only a self-righteous, self-complacent approbation of their own minds — — —

That this also is evil, we cannot doubt, if only we bear in mind that God requires our *hearts*: Prov. xxiii. 26; and that every service, in which the heart is not engaged, is declared to be vain and worthless in his sight. Matt. xv. 8, 9. Compare 2 Tim. iii. 5.

In exhorting such persons to turn from the evil of their doings, we would by no means be understood to discourage diligence in attending on divine ordinances, whether public or private; but only to guard against a resting in the performance of duties, and a substituting of that in the place of Christ. In appreciating our religious observances, let us judge of them by their spirituality, and by our enjoyment of God in them: and, if they be ever so devout, still let us remember that they make no atonement for sin, nor do they confer any obligation whatever upon God; yea, rather, the more devout they are, the more we are indebted to God for that grace whereby we are enabled so to worship him.

To confirm the exhortation, God has been pleased to add,

II. A PROMISE—

At first sight the promise appears to be unworthy of God, and incapable of affording any great encouragement to those to whom it is made. But, if taken altogether abstractedly, it surely is no light matter for those who deserve all the judgments that God can inflict, to be assured, that he will never do them any hurt: and if considered in connexion with our fears and apprehensions, it will be found to contain the richest consolation. *In this view*, we observe, God will do us no hurt in respect of,

1 Our intellect—

When we begin in earnest to be religious, our friends are ready to suppose that we are, or shall soon be, beside ourselves: see Mark iii. 21. Acts xxvi. 24. 2 Cor. v. 13: nor can we altogether wonder at their judgment, when we consider how great the change is, (like a river turning back to its source,) and how unable they are to account for it. But they may spare themselves their fears; for God gives his people, not a spirit of delusion, but “of a *sound mind*.” 2 Tim. i. 7. The prodigal’s return to his father’s house was the first proof of sanity, not of insanity: nor has any person a spark of true wisdom in him, till he begin to fear the Lord. Ps. cxi. 10. In conversion a man is made to form a correct judgment respecting his most important concerns; and not only to view things in the same light that God views them, but to act agreeably to those views. As well therefore might the man whose eyes Jesus had opened be said to have suffered injury in his organs of vi-

sion, as a person thus enlightened in his judgment be said to have suffered in his intellect.*

2. Our friends—

We are taught to expect, that, on our becoming decided followers of Christ, “our greatest foes will be those of our own household:” Matt. x. 35, 36; and experience accords with the declarations of scripture on this head. But are we therefore injured in this respect? Our Lord has told us, and experience accords with that also, that if we lose any friends for his sake, he will repay us in kind, as it were, an hundred-fold. Mark x. 29, 30. A merchant who should part with his goods to such advantage as this, would surely not be thought to have sustained any loss. But besides this recompense in the present world, God himself will be our friend, both now and for ever. And would not *this* amply repay the loss of all earthly friends?

3. Our reputation—

Though the whole of our conduct be visibly improved, yet shall we, on turning to God, be loaded with opprobrium and contempt; and though something may be gained by prudence, or conceded to us on account of our celebrity in learning, there is no religious person that occupies the same place in the estimation of the world that he would do if he were not religious. If our Lord himself was “despised and rejected of men,” Isa. liii. 3, and the apostles were deemed “the off-scouring of all things,” 1 Cor. iv. 13, it is in vain for us to expect honor from man. Matt. x. 24, 25, with John v. 44. But are we therefore without honor? No: our very disgrace, when so procured, is a very high honor, inasmuch as it assimilates us to Christ, 1 Peter iv. 13, and is a testimony to us of our fidelity. Luke xxi. 13. But suppose that ignominy had nothing to counterbalance it here, should we have any reason to regret it when Christ “confessed us before his Father, and his holy angels;” and when they who despised us, shall “awake to shame and everlasting contempt?” Dan. xii. 2.

4. Our interests—

The laws of the land certainly afford us very great protection. Nevertheless it is no uncommon thing at this day for children and servants to be called to make very great sacrifices for the gospel sake. But be it so: they are forced, like St. Paul, to serve the Lord “in cold and nakedness,” and in a privation of all earthly comforts. But are they eventually “hurt?” What if their spiritual consolations be proportioned to their temporal afflictions: have they not made a good exchange? Is not peace in the bosom incomparably better than money in the purse? The riches of this world are easily appreciated: but those which Christ imparts, are “unsearchable.” Their despisers would, at a future day, give all the world for a drop of water only to cool their tongue. How rich then must they be who are drinking living waters eternally at the fountain head!

5. Our happiness—

Doubtless the godly have grounds of mourning peculiar to themselves: but are they therefore losers in respect of happiness? No: their sorrows, if I may so speak, are sources of joy: they would on no account be without them: they rather regret that they cannot sorrow more: they mourn because they cannot mourn, and weep because they cannot weep: and if at any time they have been enabled to abase themselves before God in dust and ashes,

*That people who are insane, may fix their thoughts upon religion, or that a person may become distracted by *misapprehensions* of religion, is confessed: but if religion would drive a man mad, the more religious he was, the more likely to be mad. Who does not shudder at the consequences that would result from that opinion?

they look back upon such seasons as the most precious in their whole lives. But if they have sorrows unknown to others, have they not "joys also, with which the stranger intermeddleth not?" Let a promise be applied with power to their souls, or "the love of God be shed abroad in their hearts," have they not a very foretaste of heaven upon earth? Compare their state with that of others, on a dying bed: follow them in the instant of their departure from the body: see them welcomed to the bosom of their Lord: contemplate their eternal state, in contrast with that of their despisers; and then say whether they have any reason to complain, that their fidelity to God occasioned on the whole a diminution of their happiness?

ADDRESS,

1. Those who are yet following their evil ways—

We inquire not, What are the ways you follow: if you do not turn from *every* evil way to God, and devote yourself unreservedly to your Lord and Saviour, the issue will be the same, whatever course you take. Your guilt may be more or less aggravated, and your misery be apportioned accordingly: but, without entering into the different degrees of punishment, let me ask, Will not *sin* "do you *hurt*?" — — — And would not God do you *good*, if you would return unto him? — — — "Turn then from all your transgressions; so iniquity shall not be your ruin." Ezek. xviii. 30.

2. Those who are turning from their evil ways—

Halt not between two opinions: strive not to reconcile the inconsistent services of God and Mammon. Matt. vi. 24. "If Baal be God, follow him: but if the Lord be God, then follow him." There is a certain kind of turning unto God, by which you will suffer hurt on every side, and receive no benefit whatever. If your "heart be not whole with God," no good can accrue to you, nor can any evil be averted from you. The world will not approve of you, because you are too precise for them: and God will not approve of you, because you are not upright before him. Be not then temporizing and hypocritical, but open, decided, and consistent characters. "Follow your Lord fully:" "follow him without the camp, bearing his reproach." Heb. xiii. 13. Thus, though "your life may be accounted madness, and your end to be without honor, yet shall you be numbered among the children of God, and have your lot among his saints." Wisd. v. 4, 5.

THE SOURCE AND REMEDY OF DESPONDING FEARS.

Job xxxv. 14.—Although thou sayest thou shalt not see him, yet judgment is before him. therefore trust thou in him. (H. H.)

IN controversy there is need of the utmost candor; nor without it can we ever hope for a favorable issue. The friends of Job were grievously defective in it; and therefore utterly failed, either to convince him, or to be convinced themselves. But Elihu, who was an attentive auditor of the dispute, and who, on account of his youth, judged it indecorous to offer his sentiments till he saw that his elders were silenced, took up the matter with incomparably better temper and judgment, and, instead of bringing railing and unfounded accusations as the others had done, called Job's attention to many expressions he had used, and endeavored to convince him out of his own

mouth. This was wise, and well adapted to the end proposed: and it is observable, that when God reproved the manner in which the other three had conducted the controversy, he said nothing to the disparagement of Elihu, nor required any sacrifice on his account.

It is certain that Job, though far from being a hypocrite, as his friends had represented him, had not always spoken quite advisedly with his lips. His self-justification had been occasionally too strong, and his complaints of God's conduct towards him somewhat irreverent: he had yielded also too much to despondency. He had complained that he could not understand God's dealings with him, and that he had no hope or prospect of deliverance from his troubles. Ch. xxiii. 8, 9. This is noticed by Elihu in the words before us; and the proper remedy for such desponding fears is pointed out to him: "although thou sayest thou shalt not see God, yet judgment is before him; therefore trust thou in him;" that is, place in God that confidence he deserves; and all will yet be well.

From the words thus explained we shall be led to consider,

I. THE SOURCE OF DESPONDING FEARS—

There is far more of despondency in men than is generally supposed: perhaps it is, as much as any other thing whatever, a ground of their continuing impenitent in their sins.

The *ostensible* ground of men's fears is usually a sense of the extreme difficulty of their case—

Thus it was with Israel at the Red Sea, at the waters of Marah, at the borders of Canaan also, when the spies represented the cities as impregnable, and the inhabitants as irresistible. Thus it was even with the pious Hezekiah, when his sickness appeared to be unto death: Isa. xxxviii. 10-13, and thus it is with multitudes amongst ourselves, who imagine that their circumstances are so calamitous, as to be beyond the reach of any remedy. More particularly is this the case with persons under spiritual trouble; they are apt to imagine, that their sins are unpardonable, and that their corruptions are too inveterate ever to be subdued— —

The *real* ground is a low apprehension of the perfections of their God—

This is the interpretation which God himself puts on the unbelieving fears of his people. When Sarah laughed at the promise made to her, the answer was, "Is there any thing too hard for the Lord?" and the complaint of God against the unbelieving Israelites was, that "they limited the Holy One of Israel." In fact, a just view of God's perfections would silence all fears: for if his wisdom, his power, his love, his faithfulness be really infinite, we have nothing to do, but to repose our confidence in him, and we are safe— —

But it is a small thing to know the source of desponding fears, unless we apply,

II. THE REMEDY—

This is prescribed in the words of our text:

1. Contemplate God—

What we are to understand by that expression, "Judgment is before him," may be ascertained by consulting a similar passage in the prophet Isaiah. Isa. xxx. 18. He will do nothing but what is right and good; nor will he omit any thing which it becomes him to do.

Consider what he has done in a way of power and grace— —and is he not the same God as ever?

Consider what he has engaged to do: is there any thing that we can need, which is not made over to us by an express promise? Has he not said, that

‘his grace shall be sufficient for us;’ that “we shall have no temptation without a way to escape;” that “as our day is, so shall our strength be;” that “he will give grace and glory, and withhold no good thing” from his believing people? “Hath he then said these things, and will he not do them? hath he spoken, and will he not make them good?”

Consider, above all, the gift of his only dear Son! What else will he, or can he, withhold from us? Rom. viii. 32. Surely he will be “a strength to the poor, a strength to the needy in his distress, a refuge from the storm, a shadow from the heat, when the blast of the terrible ones is as a storm against the wall.” Isa. xxv. 4.

Did we but duly consider his glorious perfections as already exercised for his people, and as specially pledged to be exercised for us, we should never entertain a doubt of his constant and effectual care. “His name would be to us as a strong tower, to which we should run, and be safe.”

2. Trust in him—

“They that know his name will trust in him:” and to trust in him is the certain way to dissipate all fear. See how a confidence in God operated in the case of David: Psa. xlv. 1—3, and Psa. xi. 1—4; and the same effect will it produce in us: “if we commit our ways to him, our very thoughts,” (which are by nature fluctuating as the wind,) “shall be established.” This then is what we must do: we must “cast all our care on Him who careth for us.” It is the very direction which God himself gives to “those who walk in darkness and have no light:” Isa. l. 10; and if we follow this direction, “God will keep us in perfect peace;” Isa. xxvi. 3; and we shall be as Mount Zion, which cannot be removed, but standeth fast for ever.” Psa. cxxv. 1.

ADDRESS,

1. To those who overlook difficulties—

This is the habit of men in general: and hence it is that they are so much at their ease. But it is no easy matter to turn to God aright. To repent and to believe in Christ are works far beyond the ability of man; nor can any man do either the one or the other, but by the influence of the Holy Ghost. Acts v. 31; Phil. i. 29. O let this be duly weighed! Let us remember, that “we cannot even say that Jesus is the Lord,” (we cannot feelingly and believingly say it,) “but by the Holy Ghost:” 1 Cor. xii. 3; and let us not delay one hour to seek his effectual aid.

2. To those who unduly magnify them—

We certainly magnify our difficulties too much, when we deem them insuperable: for “the things that are impossible with man are possible with God.” See the state of Jonah in the whale’s belly: could any be conceived more hopeless? Yet from thence did he cry, and his prayer entered into the ears of the Lord of Hosts. Jonah ii. 1—7. Thus let us “never stagger at the promises of God through unbelief, but be strong in faith, giving glory to God.” Rom. iv. 20. The greater our difficulties, let our application to him be the most earnest, and our expectations of his gracious interposition be the more enlarged: “Be of good courage, and he shall strengthen your heart all ye that hope in the Lord.” Ps. xxxi. 24.

SEEKING THE LORD EXPLAINED AND ENFORCED.

Isa. lv. 6, 7. Seek ye the Lord while he may be found, call ye upon him while he is near: Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts: and let him return unto the Lord, and he will have mercy upon him; and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon. (B.)

In the verses now before us, the Prophet earnestly exhorts the wicked of all nations to seek the knowledge and favor of God by repentance and prayer, adding the most gracious assurance of his readiness to show "mercy and abundantly pardon."

But to enter into the meaning and force of the exhortation, let us consider,

I. WHAT IS IMPLIED IN SEEKING THE LORD.

It is to seek the KNOWLEDGE of the Lord, lost by the fall.—We do not mean the knowledge of his being, that he is; or, of his nature, what he is, a *Spirit*. This, however, the heathen did not know, or they would not have "changed the glory of the incorruptible God into an image made like to corruptible man, and to birds, and four-footed beasts, and creeping things." Rom. i. 23. Nor could hypocrites, if they were sensible of his spiritual nature, hope to please him by ceremonies, or any mere external services.—Nor do we mean the knowledge of his attributes, such as his eternity, omnipotence, omniscience, his infinite wisdom, equity and goodness; nor of the relations in which he stands to his creatures in general, or to mankind in particular, as our Creator, Governor and Benefactor. The works of creation, and the dispensations of Providence, manifest God in these respects. Rom. i. 20.—But we mean that knowledge of him which is by supernatural revelation, and communicated through his word, especially "the Word made flesh," and his Spirit. John i. 18; Eph. i. 17; 2 Cor. iv. 6; 1 John v. 20; Matt. xi. 27.

This is that acquaintance with him,—in his glory and majesty, producing the fear of him, which we have not by nature; Rom. iii. 18; a fear of reverence, a fear of awfulness, a filial fear of offending him.—In his holiness and justice, which produces humility. Job. xlii. 6; xl. 4.—In his mercy and grace, Jer. xxxi. 34, which produces confidence. Ps. ix. 10.—In his love and goodness, which produces returns of love, not only esteem, and desire, but grateful, complacential love, attended with zeal for his glory, and obedience to his will.

It is to seek HIS FAVOR, lost also by the fall, for "by nature we are the children of wrath;" Eph. ii. 3; and to be "accepted," or taken into favor. Eph. i. 6.

It is to seek HIS IMAGE, in which man was created, Gen. i. 27, but which he has lost, being earthly, sensual, devilish. James iii. 15. We are to "put off concerning the former conversation, the old man," &c. Eph. iv. 22—24.

It is to seek COMMUNION WITH HIM. This we have not by nature, "being alienated from the life of God, through the ignorance that is in us;" Eph. iv. 18; Col. i. 21; but we may attain it. 2 Cor. vi. 16; John xiv. 23; Eph. ii. 21, 22; 1 John i. 3.

It is to seek the EVERLASTING VISION AND ENJOYMENT OF HIM. Matt. v. 8; 1 John iii. 2; Rev. xxi. 3—7; xxii. 3 4.

II. HOW, OR IN WHAT WAY, THE LORD MUST BE SOUGHT.

As a preparation for seeking him, we must be sensible of our entire, or great want of him in all these respects; of the knowledge of him; of his favor; of his image; of communion with him, and the enjoyment of him.

We must be sensible of the excellency of these blessings ; of their attainableness ; of the absolute necessity of attaining them, in order to our salvation present and eternal.

We must feel desires ; earnest, increasing, restless desires after him. Thus David, Ps. xlii. 1 ; lxi. 1 ; Isa. xxvi. 8, 9.

Conscious these blessings before mentioned are God's gifts, we must seek them in prayer : Matt. vii. 7 ; and not only in *mental* prayer, though this be important, but in *vocal*. We must "call upon him."—In private. Matt. vi. 6. We mean not the *saying* our prayers, but really presenting our requests to God, for blessings which we know we want, and must obtain, or perish. We must pray sincerely, earnestly, importunately, perseveringly, and in faith, nothing doubting.—In our families, also, we must join in prayer to God.—In social meetings.—And in the public congregation ; and, therefore, we should take care to be present in time.

But in the use of these means we must be consistent. The "wicked" must "forsake his way ;" his ungodly, unrighteous, intemperate way. Tit. ii. 11, 12. "The unrighteous man," *the man of iniquity* : of injustice, fraud, violence, oppression ; "his thoughts," his deceitful imaginations, that these things are reconcileable with religion, or that he can finally prosper in such a way, or escape the Divine vengeance.—*The man of vanity* ; who pursues things unattainable, unsatisfactory, uncertain, transitory ; "his thoughts," his delusive schemes, and contrivances to obtain happiness in this way. Or, let him who vainly thinks to enlighten his own mind, expiate his own sins, change his own nature, or do the will of God of himself, in other words, who vainly "goes about to establish his own righteousness, not submitting himself to the righteousness of God," desist from such thoughts.—And let him turn to the Lord, and expect these things only from him, and seek his happiness only in him. We must turn to him in judgment,—in choice,—in intention,—resolution,—affection,—in faith, believing his truths, declarations, promises in Christ, and coming to God only through him.

III. WHEN WE MUST SEEK THE LORD.

"While he may be found."

—In life, with which, when it closes, will terminate all opportunities of seeking the Lord.—In health, not "in the floods of great waters." Ps. xxxii. 6.—In youth, the period of life more favorable than any other for obtaining true religion, and wherein a special promise is given, for the encouragement of those that begin early to seek the Lord. Eccles. ix. 10.—At least, while our day of grace lasts, and "he is near," by his Word, and the ordinances he has instituted among his people, and by his Spirit, convincing, alarming, drawing, assisting us in our endeavors.

We should remember, we cannot tell how long our day of grace may continue. With many it has ended on this side the grave. It was so with the Israelites in the wilderness, Ps. xcv. 8, 9, 11, and those who rejected our Lord's ministry, to whom he said, "Ye shall die in your sins." John viii. 21. Thus we may be given over to hardness and impenitence of heart, if we neglect to improve our present means, and the grace given to us. Prov. i. 28, 29.

We shall notice,

IV. THE GRACIOUS PROMISE MADE TO SUCH AS SEEK HIM IN THAT WAY, AND AT THAT TIME.

"He will have mercy upon him." Hebrew, "He will have the bowels of a mother to a child." Although past sins may have been many, great, aggravated, long continued ; although present corruption, temptation, and ha-

bits of sin be very strong; although hinderances and oppositions be many; and apparently insurmountable; he will "pardon" us freely and fully.—He will subdue our iniquities, and "renew" us in the spirit of our minds.—He will "strengthen us with might in our inner man," and, "strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus," we shall more than overcome all that oppose. 2 Tim. ii. 1; Rom. viii. 37.

"He will *abundantly* pardon." Hebrew, "will multiply to pardon." When such as have been guilty of very great wickedness, come to have a serious sense of their sins, and of the holiness and justice of God, they are almost inconsolable, and are wont to think their guilt too aggravated to be forgiven; hence the Prophet makes use of strong terms, and to encourage them, and lead them to repentance, he assures them God will multiply pardons as their sins have been multiplied. Rom. v. 20.—He will also again forgive, if we fall off and return to him in repentance. "He will heal our backslidings."

THE TENDER EXPOSTULATION OF HEAVEN.

Ezek. xviii. 31.—Why will ye die? (H.)

How can we, without a melting heart, see and hear those compassionate words of the good God, saying to us, "Why will ye die, O house of Israel?" The house of Israel was the church of God, the company of those who had the book of God, the covenant and ordinances of God among them, and yet God asks them, "Why will ye die," and be lost for ever? Supposing him asking us the same question, you professed christians, you that now belong to the Israel of God, "Why will ye die?" Why will ye sin on, and refuse mercy and peace, and run yourselves wilfully unto eternal death and damnation?

Consider, and meditate the extent and importance of this question. How many more are contained in the bowels of it, or may be drawn suitable thereto? Many serious and weighty questions we may ask ourselves upon every word of the question in the text. As,

I. "WHY WILL YE DIE?"

1. Why will you continue spiritually dead—Dead in your guilt, ignorance, unbelief, hardness of heart; dead to God, to religion, the ways of God, to heaven? Is there no such thing as communion with God? A having the conversation in heaven? A better country? Why continue dead to all this?

2. Why will you refuse the Author of life? Why put him to complain? John v. 40.

3. Why do ye reject and refuse the way of life, the good way that will bring you to eternal life? John xiv. 6, and the path he hath made known?

4. Why will you imbitter your own death? What a terrible death will you die, if you die in your sins?

5. Why will you venture on eternal death? Rom. vi. 23.

II. "WHY WILL YOU DIE?"

1. You, who are such noble, rational creatures; you who are the first-born of the creation, Job xxxv. 11; you who have immortality written on your minds and consciences.

2. You, who are put in the Redeemer's hand.
3. You, who have a Bible, the book of God, put into your hand.
4. You, who have life so freely and frankly offered. Isa. lv. 1, 2.
5. You, who have a Saviour standing and knocking at your doors. Rev. iii. 20.
6. You, who have the Spirit striving with you. 1 Thess. v. 19.
7. You, who have the ministers of God's word.
8. You, who have the Lord urging the case with you. "Why will you die?"
9. You, who live within the compass of the christian church. Heb. xi. 40.

III. "WHY WILL YOU DIE?"

1. Are you resolved that the blessed God shall have no more glory in your salvation? Luke xv. 32.
2. Are you resolved that the Redeemer shall have no honor or satisfaction in you, or praise for you? Rev. i. 5, 6; Isa. liii. 11.
3. That the holy angels shall have no joy or comfort in you? Luke xv. 10.
4. Do you design that the devil and damned spirits shall have your company for ever?
5. Is it not enough in your eyes, that angels have sinned and died, but you must die also? 2 Peter ii. 4.
6. Is it not enough that your first parents died, but you must die too?
7. Is it not enough that the old world died, but you must die too? Gen. vi. 11—13. That Sodom and Gomorrah died, &c., but you must die also? Gen. xix. 24; 2 Peter ii. 5, 6.
8. Is it not enough that the old house of Israel generally died, but you must also die? The prophets complained. Isa. liii. 1.
9. Are the numbers to be saved so great, that you will not be one of that number?
10. Is heaven and life so dreadful a state, that you are resolved you will not come thither? Is death and hell so happy a state, that none but that will serve you?
11. Is the misery of the heathen world so small, that you are resolved your's shall be greater? Matt. xi. 20—24.
12. Are you such enemies to yourselves, that you are resolved to die, whatever is the consequence? Is it not enough to die once, but you will die twice? Rev. xxi. 8.
13. Have you a mind to try by experience what this death is? and to defeat the Redeemer's design in going to prepare places above for such as you? John xiv. 3.

And, lastly, Are you resolved to glorify no other attribute of God but his wrath and vengeance? Is this life hastening to an end? Is death approaching apace? Is the Judge at the door? Must you, in a few days, be either in heaven or hell? among the blessed or the damned? And yet, will ye not think of these things? "Why will ye die?"

THE SALVATION OF SINNERS DESIRED BY GOD.

Ezekiel xxxiii. 11.—“As I live, saith the Lord God, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked,” &c. (Sk.)

It is evident from the uniform conduct of Ezekiel, that he well understood, and faithfully discharged his duty, as a watchman unto the house of Israel. To this office God had appointed him, verses 7—9; and, in the execution of it, he plainly set before his people both their sin and their danger. But the house of Israel, being hardened in transgression, hated reproof, and endeavored to evade the force of it, by casting the blame of their sin and misery upon God himself. This they did in effect, by the plea of necessity, verse 10. “If our transgressions and our sins be upon us, and we pine away in them, how then shall we live?” As if they had said, “Our case is hopeless, for it appears that God has decreed our destruction; and if we sin and suffer by the decree of God, how then can we be blamed? can we alter his purpose, and live when God has doomed us to die?” This impious reflection on God he strongly resents, and fully proves the injustice of it, in the language now before us: “As I live saith the Lord God, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked; but that the wicked turn from his way and live: turn ye, turn ye from your evil ways; for why will ye die, oh house of Israel?” These words lead us to observe,

I. THE STATE OF MANKIND AS SINNERS. Here we learn that it is,

1. *A state of moral evil.* They walk in evilways. By the term “*way*” is meant a course of moral conduct, including the habitual actions, words, and thoughts, of mankind, Isa. liii. 6. The plural term “*ways*” is here employed, to intimate that the courses pursued by sinners are *various* in their kinds. They are ways of *rebellion*, or opposition to God’s authority: they are open and avowed, such as St. Paul describes, 1 Cor. vi. 9, 10; Gal. v. 19—21; or they are secret and concealed, such as our Lord describes, Mark vii. 21—23. There are ways of *impenitence*, or contempt of God’s mercy: in which God is forgotten, Jer. ii. 32; and not sought, Psa. x. 4, cvii. 10, 11. There are ways of *self-deception*, or vain delusive hope, Prov. xiv. 12; such is the way of self-righteousness, Jer. xvii. 5, 6; Isa. i. 11: and such also is the way of Antinomianism, Prov. xxx. 12; Matt. vii. 21; Heb. xii. 14. But all their ways are *evil* however diversified. They are evil—because they are *iniquitous*: contrary to the rule of rectitude, 1 John iii. 4.—Because they are *painful*: occasioning present misery, Prov. xv. 19; Jer. ii. 19.—Because they are *destructive*: leading to certain ruin, Ezek. xviii. 30; Rom. vi. 21. Hence our text assures us that the state of mankind as sinners, is

2. *A state of imminent danger*:—a state in which they are certainly exposed to *death*, even to eternal death, Rom. vi. 23. By eternal death is meant the punishment inflicted on sinners in a future state, Rev. xxi. 8. This punishment is called death—*not because it implies annihilation*; for the wicked still live, when they leave this world. Their continued existence is evident from their state *before* judgment, Luke xvi. 23, 24; from their sentence *at* judgment, Matt. xxv. 41—46; and their torment *after* judgment, Rev. xiv. 10, 11.—But this punishment is called death, because *in it there is some resemblance to natural death*. To omit other circumstances, the subjects of natural death are separated from the society of the living, and become the prey either of worms or of fire. Are the subjects of natural death removed from the society of the living? so the subjects of eternal death are *banished* from the presence of God, and of those who live to him, 2 Thess. i. 7—9; Matt. xiii.

40—42. Are the subjects of natural death the common prey either of *worms* or of *fire*? This they are, according to the different customs of different countries; some being committed to the silent grave, and some being consumed on the funeral pile. Thus also the subjects of eternal death are represented as being preyed on both by the *worm* and the *fire*, Mark ix. 43, 44. Their worm is an *accusing conscience*, which condemns them as being the authors of their own misery, Jer. iv. 18. The worms of the grave indeed, though dreaded, are not *felt*, and soon *die*; but this worm *never dies*, and the torture it inflicts must be endless. The fire that consumes the bodies on the funeral pile is only a *material fire*, kindled by feeble *mortals*, and must soon become *extinct*; but the fire of hell, if not material, must be something much more dreadful: it is kindled by the wrath of *God*, Isa. xxx. 33: and will *never* be quenched, Matt. iii. 12. However, the state of sinners in this world, though alarming, is not yet hopeless. Let us therefore observe,

II. THEIR DUTY AND PRIVILEGE AS SINCERE PENITENTS.

1. *Their duty.* This is, to turn from their evil ways;—"Turn ye," &c. Turn from your ways of *rebellion*, by entire *reformation*, Isa. lv. 7; Ezek. xviii. 27.—Turn from your ways of *impenitence*, by earnest *prayer*, Hos. xiv. 1, 2; Luke xviii. 13. Turn from your ways of *self-deception*, by coming to God, trusting in Christ's mediation, John xiv. 6; and by seeking a new creation, Gal. vi. 16; Psal. li. 10.—Turn *seasonably*: without delay, Isa. lv. 6; Job xxii. 21.—Turn *perpetually*: without defection, Jer. 1. 5.—Turn *believingly*: in confident expectation of salvation, Heb. x. 19—22. That as gospel penitents your confidence may be strengthened, observe,

2. *Their privilege.* This is, to be *saved from death*, and *enjoy life*.—To be *saved from death*, Ezek. xviii. 28. All genuine believers in our Lord Jesus Christ are saved from death by being delivered from the dominion of spiritual, and the sentence of eternal death, John xi. 25, 26. By means of this salvation from death, they are brought also—*To enjoy life*. The life enjoyed by them is comprehensive; including an interest in God's manifested favor, Psal. xxx. 5, lxiii. 3;—actual devotedness to God's service, Rom. vi. 13;—and the eternal possession of heaven, Rom. ii. 6, 7. Observe,

3. *The attainment of this privilege is as certain as it is desirable.* It is certain, from God's earnest *command*; "Turn ye, turn ye from your evil ways." This interests you in God's sincerity, Isa. xlv. 19.—It is certain, from God's solemn *oath*; "As I live, saith the Lord," &c. This interests you in God's *veracity*, Heb. vi. 18.—It is certain from God's gracious *expostulation*; "Why will ye die, O house of Israel?" This interests you in God's most affectionate regard. Almost every word in this kind expostulation emphatically expresses the great concern of God for the salvation of mankind. These words, therefore, "Why will ye die?" most forcibly suggest the most direct and distinct APPLICATION of our text.

1. *Why will ye die?* By continuing in sin, you choose death, the worst of all evils; and eternal death, which is the worst of all deaths. Carelessly to squander away your earthly goods and possessions is bad; to impair and destroy your health is worse; to waste and murder your time is worse still: for 'Time destroyed, is suicide: where more than blood is spilt.'—But to plunge your immortal souls into death eternal, is the very worst of crimes; for this is murder, self-murder, and even self-murder of the blackest description: it is an exploit of *wickedness* which can never be forgiven, and for which no atonement has ever been made.

2. *Why will ye die?* By what arguments can you justify your conduct at the bar of your own conscience? Is not God a better master than the de-

vil? Is not holiness better employment than sin! Are not the treasures of grace and heaven better enjoyments than hell and damnation? Is not the pursuit of life more rational and more conducive to happiness than the pursuit of death?—If it be, then in choosing death instead of life, your *folly* is as great as your wickedness. Every sinner therefore may justly exclaim with Saul;—"I have played the fool, and have erred exceedingly," 1 Sam. xxvi. 21.

3. *Why will ye die?*—*Ye men!* concerning whom there is still hope of salvation. You are not devils, for whom a Redeemer was never provided; you are not lost souls in hell, who are out of the reach of divine mercy; Christ still seeks you, that he may save you, Rev. iii. 20.—*Ye Americans!* the peculiar favorites of heaven; who enjoy the clearest gospel light, the greatest religious liberty, and the highest advantages for piety, in the richest abundance, Psa. cxlvi. 20.—*Ye professing Christians!* who are called by the name of Christ, and are encouraged in his word to seek him, 2 Chron. vii. 14; who are baptized in the name of Christ, and bound by the most solemn vows to serve him alone, Eccl. v. 4.—*Ye Protestants!* who are delivered from, and protest against the pernicious errors which have crept into the visible church of Christ; if you continue in sin, your *inconsistency* will be as great as your wickedness and your folly: and when judged at the bar of God, you must be found without excuse, Matt. xxii. 12, 13.

4. *Why will ye die?* Remember, if thou die eternally, it must be because you *will* die; your death must be the result of your own deliberate choice; for *God wills your salvation*. This is evident, not only from his word and oath here recorded, but also from his *long-suffering*, 2 Pet. iii. 9;—from the *tears* of Christ over perishing sinners, Matt. xxiii. 37; Luke xix. 41, 42;—and from his being *given* to die in our stead, Rom. viii. 32. And *Divine grace renders you capable of seeking salvation*, with the utmost certainty of success, Phil. ii. 12, 13. Then *resolve* with the prodigal;—"I will arise," &c., Luke xv. 18, 19. Imitate David in resolute *promptitude*, Psa. cxix. 59, 60. And confidently *hope* with Micah, Mic. vii. 18, 19.

REST FOR THE WEARY AND HEAVY LADEN.

Matthew xi. 28.—Come unto me all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. (Sk.)

THE numerous miracles which our blessed Lord performed, proved that his mission was divine; and the various sermons and parables which he delivered, constrained those who heard him to exclaim, "Never man spake like this man!" Grace was poured into his lips; and in him were accomplished the words of the prophet,—"The Lord God hath given me the tongue of the learned, that I should know how to speak a word in season to him that is weary." He warned the unruly, instructed the ignorant, comforted the distressed, and poured the balm of consolation into the wounded spirit. Many were the gracious words which proceeded out of his mouth; and a few of his discourses have been recorded for the instruction, encouragement, and edification of those upon whom the ends of the world are come. Our text, found in one of these discourses, has ever been salutary to those who have felt distressed on account of their sin; and if there were no

other passage of the same complexion in the Bible, this would be sufficient to inspire hope, and to banish despair. The subject connected with these words, comprehends,

I. THE PERSONS ADDRESSED are described as "laboring, and heavy laden."

1. *They labor.* This expression signifies, the act of doing something which requires strong exertion. Many of the Jews labored hard to recommend themselves to God, by observing various rites and ceremonies, Rom. x. 3. They were required by divine authority to offer a great number of costly sacrifices;—to travel to Jerusalem three times a year to worship God, and to observe various ritual precepts. In the days of our Lord, their teachers bound heavy burdens, and grievous to be borne, and laid them on their shoulders; and thus the Jewish yoke became intolerably oppressive;—"A yoke," said St. Peter, "which neither our fathers nor we were able to bear."

The Jews are not the only persons who have labored to merit heaven, by the performance of what are called religious duties: many who name the name of Christ, and profess to believe the articles of the christian faith, are not less sanguine in their expectations of being saved by their own endeavors;—they toil and labor to cancel the debt which they have contracted, to atone for the sins which they have committed; and thus to obtain that heaven, which they are conscious they have forfeited. But Jesus Christ is the only way to the Father,—the only Mediator between God and man,—the only Physician of souls,—the only Saviour of sinners, John xiv. 6; Acts iv. 12; 1 Cor. iii. 11.

2. *They are heavy laden.* They feel the burden of sin, Psal. xxxviii. 4; Isa. xxxviii. 14,—the reproaches of a guilty conscience, Prov. xviii. 14; Acts ii. 37,—the wrath of God abiding on them, Psal. xxxii. 4. Such persons are prepared to receive the blessing of the gospel, Matt. v. 4,—they are the individuals to whom the promises of pardon and salvation are addressed, Isa. lv. 1,—the very characters which Christ came to save, 1 Tim. i. 15; Luke xix. 10. Hence,

II. THE INVITATION GIVEN TO THEM;—"Come unto me;" which signifies, that,

1. *We must address Christ in prayer.* Prayer is the desire of the soul expressed to God; it is God's appointed means, in the use of which he hath engaged to give us whatever we need, Matt. vii. 7. Prayer may be as effectually expressed by the sighs and groans of a broken and contrite spirit, as by the most suitable words. This duty is not only easy to perform, but it is indispensably necessary; without prayer we cannot be saved, Ezek. xxxvi. 37; Rom. x. 13. Let us not, however, suppose, that there is any thing meritorious in prayer; our prayers cannot purchase the favor of God, or the remission of sin.

2. *We must come in the exercise of faith.* Unbelief pours contempt on the Saviour, and excludes us from any share in the blessings of salvation; but faith honors God, and secures an interest in all that Jesus has done and suffered for sinners; see 1 Tim. v. 10; Rom. iv. 5; Acts x. 43, and xiii. 38, 39; Heb. xi. 16. *We must believe that Christ is a suitable Saviour.* Are we ignorant of God, of our duty, and of our privileges? Christ is our wisdom. Are we under guilt and condemnation? Christ is our righteousness. Are we in a state of moral defilement; polluted with sin, and altogether filthy and abominable? Christ is our sanctification, 1 John i. 7; 1 Cor. i. 30, 31. Our stubborn wills he can subdue—our defiled consciences he can purge—our wicked hearts he can cleanse. In coming to Christ, we

should keep this in mind; "He is able to save" me; though my sins are ever so numerous, or aggravated, he can pardon them; though my nature is ever so much depraved, he can renew me: see Heb. vii. 25. *We must believe that he is a willing Saviour.* Why should we question his willingness? Did he not voluntarily take our nature—endure the contradiction of sinners—and submit to be condemned, and scourged, and crucified? Every groan he heaved, every tear he shed, every drop of blood he poured out, tells us that his heart is made of tenderness, and that he is full of mercy and of grace. *The text embraces all kinds and degrees of sinners:*—"Come unto me all ye that labor and are heavy laden." Whatever you have been, or whatever you have done, if you only come to the Saviour with an humble, lowly, penitent, and believing heart, he will receive you graciously. *And to whom would you go?* The law condemns you, your own consciences condemn you; you are wretched, Rev. iii. 17. Your repentance, your tears, your prayers, cannot save you; you must come to Christ, or perish. Let me entreat you to make an *early* application to Christ, Heb. iii. 15; 2 Cor. vi. 2, and you shall realize,

III. THE BLESSING PROMISED TO THOSE WHO ACCEPT THE INVITATION. A guilty conscience is compared to a troubled sea, which cannot rest: there is no peace to the wicked; no peace with God—no peace in the mind. As long as we continue under the guilt of sin, and the curse of the law, and the wrath of God, how can we expect to be at rest? That soul must be dreadfully oppressed, and grievously tormented, which has such a load to sustain; but if we accept the Saviour's invitation, he will deliver us from all our perplexing doubts, and from all our tormenting fears.

1. *The cause of misery and distress will be removed.* All the anguish of mind which we ever felt, was the effect of sin; nor is it possible for us to be happy while under the guilt and power of moral evil. Our iniquities must be forgiven—our persons must be justified—before we can have peace with God. When the laboring and heavy-laden sinner comes to Christ, believes in him, and receives him in all his saving offices, he obtains the remission of sins, receives the Spirit of adoption, and is accepted in the Beloved. Rom. v. 1, 11; Heb. iv. 3. His conscience no longer accuses him, 2 Cor. i. 12; the law no longer condemns him, Gal. iii. 13; Rom. viii. 1,—the wrath of God no longer oppresses him, Isa. xxxviii. 17, and xii. 1,—he is no longer the slave of sin, Rom. vi. 14, 22, or the captive of Satan, 2 Tim. ii. 26; Col. i. 13,—he is saved from the fear of death and the dread of eternity. *Another cause of misery is removed,* by the renewal of the mind—the regeneration of fallen nature; in consequence of which, the evil tempers and dispositions no longer predominate, and distress the soul, see Gal. v. 17—24.

2. *The comforts of religion are communicated.* These are genuine, various, and extensive, Prov. iii. 13—18. Oh what a change is produced in the views and feelings of a person who is justified freely by divine grace! He thinks on the horrible dungeon out of which he has been brought; he calls to mind the wormwood and the gall—the guilt and anguish under which he labored: and contrasting these with the privileges of his present state, and the glory of his future prospects, he says, or sings, with the Psalmist, Psa. cxvi. 7—12. "Return unto thy rest," &c.

3. But we shall never realize the full import of the Saviour's gracious promise, until we enter upon that rest which remaineth for the people of God Isa. lvii. 2; Rev. xiv. 13. and xxi. 3, 4.

Let the subject teach

1. *The self-righteous Pharisee*, who is laboring to meet heaven by his imaginary good works, that such an attempt is foolish, and dangerous, and destructive, Rom. iii. 19, 20; Matt. v. 20, and xxi. 31; Isa. l. 11.

2. *The mourning penitent*,—that Christ kindly invites, and is waiting to receive him, 2 Pet. i. 4; Isa. lv. 7—9; Micah vii. 18, 19.

3. *The soul happily paraoned*,—to be thankful, Ps. cxvi. 12, 13,—to be humble, Ezek. xvi. 63,—to be watchful, 1 Cor. x. 12,—and steadfast, Rev. ii. 10.

AN INVITATION TO PARTICIPATE IN THE GOODNESS OF THE LORD.

Ps. xxxiv. 8. O taste and see that the Lord is good. (Sk.)

If there be any exercise upon earth that bears a resemblance to the employment of heaven, or any sensation that men feel in common with angels, it is that of gratitude to God; and among all the inspired writers, no man engaged more heartily in this delightful occupation than David, who was the author of this psalm. It is in a peculiar sense a psalm of praise. David begins it by declaring, "I will bless the Lord at all times," &c. There are certain exercises in the Christian life suited to peculiar seasons, but praise is never unsuitable; gratitude is never ill-timed; "My soul shall make her boast in the Lord." Some boast in their wealth; others in their personal accomplishments: David gloried in the Lord; and not satisfied with doing this alone, he invited others to engage in the same exercise—"O magnify the Lord," &c., ver. 3. He then assigns the reason why he magnified the Lord, ver. 4—6; and in the text, under the influence of the same spirit, he adds, "O taste and see that the Lord is good." We have in this passage,

I. SOMETHING ASSUMED:—That "the Lord is good." There are few expressions that occur more frequently in the Psalms than this, and there is no sentiment that should be more deeply or constantly impressed upon our minds.

1. *God is infinitely good.* His goodness knows no bounds, limits, nor dimensions; so that we may well exclaim, "How great is thy goodness!"

2. *God is independently good.* His goodness is all his own; there are good men and good angels, but these are dependently good: their goodness is not essential to their natures.

3. *God is absolutely good.* His goodness can never be extended, nor diminished; our goodness is capable of increase; it may be augmented, perhaps to all eternity; but God's goodness is always the same.

4. *God is unchangeably good.* There is no variability in his goodness: our goodness is mutable; we are liable to change every day, but God change not.

5. *God is universally good.* He is good to all, and good every where: his goodness is the same in every part of the globe, and in heaven and earth the same.

6. *God is eternally good.* His goodness endureth for ever; he cannot cease to be good.

II. SOMETHING IMPLIED:—That the goodness of the Lord may be *seen* and *tasted*. There are various mediums through which the goodness of the Lord may be seen.

1. *The creation is a kind of glass or mirror, which reflects the goodness of the Lord.* There was a period in eternity, in which God alone existed; he was not necessitated to form any creatures; but he was pleased to do it, not so much to exhibit his eternal power, as to communicate his infinite goodness; hence when God finished his works of creation, he "saw every thing that he had made, and behold it was very good."

2. *The goodness of the Lord may be seen in the provision made for all creatures.* "These all wait upon thee," &c., *Psa. civ. 27.* "The eyes of all wait upon thee," &c., *Psa. cxlv. 15.* "Consider the ravens, for they neither sow nor reap," &c., *Luke xii. 24.*

3. *The goodness of the Lord may be seen in the redemption of the world by Jesus Christ.* Man, by his personal transgression, forfeited all title to the divine favor, and exposed himself to eternal punishment; but oh! the riches of God's goodness induced him to deliver up his own Son to death for our ransom. What but goodness, unmerited and unparalleled goodness, would provide for us such a Saviour? so *suitable* to our necessities, so *powerful* to help us, and so *willing* to do us good.

4. *The goodness of the Lord may be seen in the means of grace with which we are favored.* Here is the gospel, containing glad tidings and good news, spread before us. Here are the ambassadors of peace crying, "Ho! every one that thirsteth," &c. Here is the Spirit of God ready to work in us all goodness, and righteousness, and truth. Here are friends saying, "Come thou with us, and we will do thee good." And here are many personal, social, and religious advantages, all of which serve to display the divine goodness.

5. *The goodness of the Lord may be seen in the rewards of heaven;* rewards beyond the power of human conception, gratuitously bestowed, and lasting as eternity. But the goodness of the Lord may not only be seen but tasted. The soul has its appetites as well as the body. *Tasting*, literally, is proving the quality of any thing by the mouth, or palate. David said, "How sweet are thy words unto my taste!" St. Paul mentions some who had "tasted of the heavenly gift." To taste that the Lord is good, is to enjoy his goodness: we do this, 1. *When we receive a knowledge of salvation by the remission of our sins.* A soul laboring under a sense of guilt tastes the bitter bread of misery, and drinks the cup of baleful grief: but when God gives the burdened conscience ease, and communicates a knowledge of his favor, then the man tastes that the Lord is good. 2. *When the love of God is shed abroad in the heart.* When we feel that we love him because he first loved us. 3. *When the promises are applied to our hearts by the power of the Holy Ghost.* In seasons of inward conflict or outward opposition.

III. SOMETHING ENJOINED. "O taste and see," &c. This invitation, request, or admonition is.

1. *Divine in its origin.* David wrote it, who was a warrior, a politician, a monarch, and a divine; but he wrote it under the influence of the Holy Ghost, and therefore it is God that speaks to us in the affectionate language of the text.

2. *Reasonable in its nature.* We are endowed with powers and faculties capable of this exercise; we can taste and see that the Lord is good; and what God has rendered us capable of doing, it is reasonable that we should do. The inferior orders of beings see nature smiling around them, but the Lord of nature they cannot see: they taste their rich pastures, but the goodness of God they cannot taste.

3. *Pleasurable in its exercise.* Sometimes we contemplate the divine character with trembling awe; God comes out of his place to punish the inhabitants of the earth for their iniquity. He rides in the whirlwind, and directs the storm; and we hear the voice of God, and are afraid: but to taste and see that the Lord is good, produces feelings of another description; feelings of pleasure, which can never be exceeded on earth, and enjoyments which can only be paralleled in heaven.

4. *Profitable in its result.* This is the only method by which we can enjoy God. The more we taste and see of the goodness of God, the more contentment we shall possess in our stations, and the more resignation to the allotments of God's providence. By tasting and seeing the goodness of the Lord upon earth, we shall be prepared for these exercises in heaven, and we shall anticipate with exquisite delight the period, when we shall see as we are seen, and know as we are known.

INFER,

1. That there is something more in religion than the mere profession, or outward form: there is the exercise of mental powers: a tasting and seeing the Lord is good. This is personal, and known only to ourselves.

2. How wretched those are who forego these pleasures, and refuse to comply with the requisition in the text,—who know nothing but animal gratification and sensual pleasure.

3. Those who enjoy personal piety, are anxious for others to realize the same enjoyment, and are ready to say to their families, friends, and neighbors, "O taste and see that the Lord is good."

4. If the Lord is good, let us learn the design of that goodness. Rom. ii. 4.



PURITY NECESSARY TO SALVATION.

Jer. v. 14.—Oh Jerusalem, wash thine heart from wickedness, that thou mayest be saved.
How long shall thy vain thoughts lodge within thee? (Sk.)

WHEN Jeremiah was called to the prophetic office, the moral state of the Jews was awfully degenerate and deplorable. As a nation, they had forsaken "the fountain of living water," and abandoned themselves to idolatry and every species of wickedness. Their defection and disobedience greatly displeased the God of their fathers, and caused him to chastise them for their impiety, and permit them to be carried captives into Babylon, under the galling yoke of their enemies. But previous to that calamitous event, the Lord sent his servants the prophets, to give them timely warning, and exhort them to immediate repentance. Such was manifestly the import and design of Jeremiah's commission, which he faithfully executed, in the midst of opposition and extreme discouragement. In the text and context he earnestly entreats the inhabitants of Jerusalem and Judea to return unto the Lord their God as the only way to be preserved from the *tyranny* of their enemies, and cleansed from the *impurity* of their iniquities;—"O Jerusalem, wash thine heart," &c. But these words will strictly apply to mankind universally, as fallen and polluted sinners; and explicitly suggest and declare the natural depravity of the human heart—the spiritual purity which the Lord requires—and the absolute necessity of personal holiness. Let us observe.

I. THE NATURAL DEPRAVITY OF THE HUMAN HEART ;—" Wash thine *heart* from wickedness." By the *heart*, we may here understand all the faculties of the soul, and passions of the mind ; and by the "*wickedness* of the heart," the total corruption and moral defilement of human nature. But this doctrine is frequently misrepresented, and often denied, and must therefore be explained and proved ; as a position founded in *truth*, and confirmed by *evidence*.

1. *This doctrine requires definition.* When we maintain that man by nature is *wholly* depraved, and destitute of all spiritual goodness, we do not mean to deny that he may not be endued with some *comparative* and *moral* excellencies of natural disposition and mental attainments. It is evident, from a very partial acquaintance with mankind, that many in their natural state possess highly intelligent minds, liberal sentiments, amiable tempers, and benevolent hearts ; but no man by nature is *spiritually good*, or pleasing to God. All are deeply fallen, polluted, and prone to every evil thought, word, and work, Eph. ii. 3. This depravity of the heart includes *the entire absence of the divine image*. God made man originally in his own likeness, in knowledge, righteousness, and true holiness ; but through sin we have become ignorant, corrupt, and ungodly, both in heart and life, Rom. iii. 12-18 ; Eph. iv. 18.—*A natural aversion to God and godliness.* Hence there is in the unregenerate heart a deep rooted dislike and hatred to the purity of religion, and the sacred exercises of spiritual devotion, which fully proves that "the carnal mind is enmity against God ; for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be," Col. i. 21.—*A universal propensity or disposition to evil.* The mind, the will, the conscience, and the affections, are altogether alienated from God, and *naturally* inclined to resist his truth, and indulge in all the polluted habits of vice, and unhallowed pleasures of sin. Such is the *original degeneracy* and internal wickedness of every human being by nature, Job xv. 16 ; John iii. 6 ; Rom. i. 29-32. But,

2. *This doctrine demands evidence.* It is sometimes much easier to state a position, than to prove it ; but in the case before us, the latter is no more difficult than the former. It is so obvious a truth, that man is a fallen and sinful creature, that it cannot be denied without a manifest contempt of reason, violation of conscience, and rejection of scripture.—*It is divinely revealed.* It is explicitly taught by Moses and the prophets, and by Jesus Christ and his apostles. They are perfectly unanimous in their sentiments and representations of this humiliating subject. They assure us that "every imagination of the thoughts of the heart is only evil continually ;—the heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked ;—from within, out of the heart of man, proceedeth all evil ;—that which is born of the flesh is flesh ;—the body of sin shall be destroyed, even the old man, which is corrupt according to the deceitful lusts," &c., Mark vii. 20-23. *It is practically exemplified.* In every age and nation, "the wickedness of man has been great in the earth." The heathen moralists acknowledged the fact, but could not account for its origin and prevalence. Revelation, however, explains the subject ; and the various afflictions and miseries to which human nature is incident, fully demonstrate that we are "children of wrath, shapen in iniquity, and conceived in sin."—*It is deeply lamented.* The pious sincerely mourn over "the flesh which lusteth against the spirit," and earnestly desire and pray for its utter destruction ; that they may be "redeemed from all iniquity, and purified unto the Lord a peculiar people," Psa. ii. 2, 3, 7. As closely connected with the doctrine of moral depravity, we may consider,

II. THE SPIRITUAL PURITY WHICH THE LORD REQUIRES;—“O Jerusalem! wash thine heart from wickedness,—how long shall thy vain thoughts lodge within thee?” This affectionate and impressive address is highly instructive, and evidently implies,

1. *The possibility of obtaining purity of heart.* If it were impossible, the exhortation would be superfluous and vain; but it certainly is attainable, and therefore ought to be earnestly desired, and diligently sought. This will appear *from the design of redemption*; which was to “open a fountain for sin and uncleanness, and to purge our consciences from dead works, to serve the living God,” Heb. ix. 13, 14; 1 Pet. i. 18, 19.—*From the ability of the Saviour*; who, by the characters he sustains, and the offices which he executes, is infinitely qualified to “save unto the uttermost, and redeem his people from all their iniquities,” John i. 16; 1 Cor. i. 30.—*From the promises of scripture*, in which the Lord engages freely and fully to save them that believe, “by the washing of regeneration, and the renewing of the Holy Ghost,” Ezek. xxxvi. 26, 27; 1 Pet. i. 4.—*And from the experience of believers*; whose hearts are purified by faith, “as vessels unto honor,” sanctified, and meet for the master’s use, and “prepared unto every good work,” Rom. vi. 22; 1 John i. 7.

2. *The important duty of seeking purity of heart.* “O Jerusalem! wash thine heart,” &c. This exhortation or command does not imply that we can cleanse ourselves from the stains of iniquity, but simply inculcates an immediate and diligent use of the means of grace, as necessary to obtain salvation, Ezek. xviii. 31. That “our hearts may be washed from wickedness,” *we must repent of our sins*: for without repentance there is no forgiveness, nor peace with God, Isa. lv. 7; Acts iii. 19.—*We must believe in Jesus Christ*; for it is only by faith that we can realize an interest in his redeeming benefits, and participate the cleansing efficacy of the blood of sprinkling, Acts xxvi. 18; Heb. xii. 24.—*We must give ourselves unto prayer*; for the Lord will be inquired of for every blessing; and hence we should humbly and fervently pray, that we may be “washed and sanctified in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God,” Ps. ii. 10; 1 Thess. v. 23.—*We must also seek the Lord without delay*; for “how long,” saith the Almighty, “shall thy vain,” wicked, unbelieving, and impenitent “thoughts lodge within thee?”—O Jerusalem! O sinners! cleanse your hands and purify your hearts in the blood of the Lamb, for now is the day of salvation, Isa. lv. 6; 2 Cor. vi. 2. This duty is strongly enforced by,

III. THE ABSOLUTE NECESSITY OF PERSONAL HOLINESS;—“That thou mayest be saved.” Purity and happiness are inseparable. We are saved by being *purified*; and hence said Christ to Peter, “If I wash thee not, thou hast no part with me.”

1. *Personal holiness is a necessary property of religion.* It is very possible to assume the profession and form of godliness, whilst we are entire strangers to its vital energy and power. And it is to be feared that many rest in the *letter*, without the *spirit* of christianity; and have a name to live, while they are *spiritually* dead. But pure and undefiled religion does not consist in the barren speculations of the deluded enthusiast, nor in the external ceremonies of the formal professor, Gal. vi. 15; it principally resides in the *heart*, enlightening, enriching, and hallowing every power of the soul unto the Lord; and directing every desire, disposition, and pursuit, to the glory of his name, 1 Cor. vi. 19, 20; 1 Pet. i. 15, 16. Without this *inter-*

nal purity and spirituality of mind, the profession of religion is an empty parade, and can profit us nothing, Rom. xiv. 17.

2. *Personal holiness is a necessary meetness for heaven.* Reason teaches us that there must be a similarity and agreement between the *faculty* of enjoyment and the *object* enjoyed. Now God is essentially just and holy, and therefore can never be the *portion* of impenitent and unholy souls. The scriptures also assure us, that "without holiness no man can see the Lord;" "for nothing that defileth, or maketh a lie, can in any wise enter into the kingdom of God," Matt. v. 8; 1 Cor. vi. 9, 10. Deliverance from the guilt, the power, and the pollution of sin, is a doctrine uniformly taught by divine revelation,—is personally confirmed in the experience of the saints,—and is absolutely necessary to obtain complete and eternal *salvation* in the world to come.

These reflections should excite deep humility and self-abasement as fallen sinners, and promote an earnest application to Jesus the Mediator of the new covenant, whose "blood cleanseth from all unrighteousness."

THE GOSPEL CALL.

Matthew xxi. 28—33.—But what think ye? A certain man had two sons; and he came to the first, and said, Son, go work to-day in my vineyard," &c. (Sk.)

In these verses our Saviour shows by the parable of two sons, that penitent publicans and harlots were in a far more eligible state or condition for receiving the gospel, than self-righteous persons. For understanding this parable, it is necessary to consider generally and briefly, that our Saviour, by the first of these sons, represents publicans, harlots, tax-gatherers, and sinners of all descriptions, who convinced of their awful state and danger, by the preaching of the word, proved far better than at first they promised, turning away from all their iniquities, and readily and heartily embracing the gospel; and by the second son, he represents the learned scribes and the self-righteous pharisees, who promised fair, and performed nothing. This parable was designed for the reproof and correction of the scribes and pharisees; and therefore our Saviour appeals to themselves, that out of their own mouth he might judge and condemn them.

I. AN INJUNCTION;—"Son, go work to-day in my vineyard." This *certain man*, who had two sons, is intended to represent God. He came to the first, and said, "Son, go work to-day in my vineyard." Here we have the Father's command, *Go work*—thou must not be idle. *Go work in my vineyard*, thou must be employed where I appoint thee. *Go work to-day*, thou must do it immediately. This command of God concerns all of us: we are enjoined to go and work to-day in his vineyard,—to make religion our present business. Here we may observe,

1 *That true religion is a work*; and though hard and difficult, yet pleasant and profitable. "Strait is the gate, and narrow is the way which leadeth unto life," Matt. vii. 14. Yet the "ways of wisdom are ways of pleasantness, and all her paths are peace," Prov. iii. 17. God's "commandments are not grievous," 1 John v. 3; and "in keeping of them their is great reward," Ps. xix. 11.

2. *That the gospel or ministerial call to this work requires and demands present obedience.* "Go work to-day." To-morrow may be too late. "To-day if ye will hear his voice harden not your hearts," Heb. iii. 15. We are called to "work while it is day;" for "the night cometh when no man can work," John ix. 4. The brevity of human life, and the important work of our salvation to be accomplished while it lasts, are considerations which should occupy the attention, and deeply impress the heart of every one.

3. *That this call is full both of authority and affection;* because it is the command of a *Father*, and it is directed to us as *children*. "Go, son, work to-day in my vineyard." He calls him *son*, to remind him of his own authority, to oblige and dispose of him as he pleases, to excite him to reverence, confidence, affection, and obedience; and to assure him, on his compliance, subjection, and faithfulness, and of all paternal regards, and an ample remuneration. What encouragement is here given to sinners, to devote themselves to God and his service!

II. THE ANSWER OF THE SON;—"He said, I will not: but afterwards he repented and went."

2. *This answer of the son is a very unfeeling and impertinent one.* He might have been more respectful; and if he had not a mind to go, might have excused himself in more modest language, and not given a direct refusal, saying, *I will not*. This is the voice of corrupt nature, the language of folly and madness; and shows us the entertainment which the gospel injunctions meet with from the majority of those persons who are thus addressed. We see here a picture of the state of fallen man, the prevalence of the carnal mind, and how unwelcome the salvation of Christ is to practical sinners. They even treat him with most censurable neglect, and insolent contempt.

2. *But afterwards he repented, and went.* Some persons will not go from their word, lest they should be deemed inconsistent. Afterwards the son repented;—better late wise, than never wise. He changed his mind, from a conviction that he had done wrong: the immediate effect is obedience, he *went* into his father's vineyard. The gospel call meets with peremptory refusals from multitudes of those who hear it; they refuse "him that speaketh from heaven," Heb. xii. 25; which conduct exposes them to the greatest peril,—*"How shall we escape if we neglect so great salvation?"* Heb. ii. 3. Obedience is the sure way of escaping danger, and the only evidence of a change of heart. Well it is when profligate sinners amend their ways, and turn to God. *He repented;* and as a proof of it, *went* into the vineyard.

3. *Though this change of mind in him involves in it a contradiction, yet his conduct in this instance can be justified on the soundest principles both of reason and revelation.* On what grounds can a life of sin and disobedience be vindicated? Not on any correct view of man's responsibility while in this world; nor on the doctrine of a suitable retribution beyond the grave. Sin brings disgrace on the character of man, and renders him the subject of guilt and misery.

III. THE FATHER CAME TO THE SECOND SON, AND SAID, "Go, work to-day in my vineyard."

1. *This son had the same kind of call given him that the other had.* The same call, as to the sense of it, is given to all who are favored with the gospel; but it is very different in its effects, for to some it is "the savor of death unto death," while to others it is "the savor of life unto life," 2 Cor. ii. 15, 16. He answered, "*I go, sir; and went not.*" This answer is very different from that of his brother. He called his father "sir," expressive of respect and complaisance, and promised ready obedience. He did

not say, I will go, but "I go," promptly, immediately, now. But he *went not*; he spake well, but did nothing: saying and doing are two things. His answer should be ours; we should say from the heart, *We go*: but then we should take care that we act according to our profession of obedience.

2. *The command of our heavenly Father should be received with great reverence*; and men should express their gratitude for such a gracious call, by a ready compliance. But alas! many who make a pompous profession of obedience are the most reluctant to fulfil their engagements. How many are there in the christian world, who profess that they know God according to the holy scriptures, but daily deny him in their spirit and temper, as well as their words and works. What a deception! Their foundation is sand, which will give way, and the whole imaginary structure fall down. And what will they do, when God calls them to judgment?

Hence we learn, that the religion of many persons consists only in good purposes and resolutions; but this will not avail, for they only are blessed who "do his commandments," as an evidence of possessing saving grace. Let us therefore secure the inward principle of saving grace, that we may be assisted to glorify God in all our works.

ISRAEL EXHORTED TO RETURN TO THE LORD.

Hosea xiv. 1, 2.—O Israel, return unto the Lord thy God; for thou hast fallen by thine iniquity. Take with you words, and turn unto the Lord: say unto him, Take away all iniquity, and receive us graciously: so will we render the calves of our lips. (Sk.)

THE conduct of God towards Israel, and Israel's conduct towards God, form the most interesting topics with which the Old Testament abounds. David declared that God had not dealt so with any nation; and as a confirmation of this, we need only review the series of wonders and miracles which adorn their whole history. And yet their conduct towards God excites almost equal astonishment, in the serious and contemplative mind. Their repeated murmurings and abominable idolatries often provoked the Divine Being to pour out his indignation upon them, but in wrath he remembered mercy. He raised up prophets, and sent them forth as the ambassadors of peace, to warn the people of their danger, and to call them to repentance. Hosea was a man of this description, who lived in the days of Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah, kings of Judah. An epitome of his general message we have in the text. "O Israel, return," &c. We notice here,

I. AN AWFUL FACT STATED; "Thou hast fallen by thine iniquity." The term *fall* is used literally, when we speak of a body descending from a higher to a lower situation: thus we say, the fall of a leaf, or the fall of a stone. But when the fall of angels or of man is mentioned, we understand the term figuratively: so we apply it in the text, "Thou hast fallen by thine iniquity." To explain this, we observe, God is a being of infinite dignity, and is called the Most High; not because he occupies the most exalted sphere in a local sense, but because he is above all in his natural and moral perfections. Holy angels and glorified spirits, being most like God in the purity of their natures, are considered as surrounding his throne, and standing in his presence; while the devil and his angels, who are farthest removed from all moral rectitude,

are most degraded, cast down to hell, into a bottomless pit of fire and brimstone. A state of sin is a low estate; and when a man turns from good to bad, he is considered as fallen. Thus Israel had,

1. *Fallen from their allegiance to God.* There was a period in their history, when the Lord was their King, and they were under his immediate government; "but they rejected him that he should not reign over them," 1 Sam. viii. 7. "They have set up kings, but not by me," &c., Hos. viii. 4.

2. *Fallen from his worship.* "They had their molten images of silver, and idols," &c., Hos. xiii. 2. "They sacrificed upon the tops of mountains," &c., iv. 12, 13. And they were "joined to idols," iv. 17.

3. *Fallen from the enjoyment of his favor.* The Lord had a controversy with them, and was fixed to punish them, &c., Hos. xii. 2. "They have sown the wind, and they shall reap the whirlwind," viii. 7. "I will meet them as a bear bereaved of her whelps," xiii. 8. "Fallen by *thine* iniquity," 'The iniquity by which they fell was *personal*.' "O Israel thou hast destroyed *thyself*," xiii. 9. "Israel is an empty vine," &c., x. 1. It was *mental*. "Their heart was divided," x. 2. Whoredom and wine had taken away their heart, iv. 11. It was *practical*. They rejected knowledge, forgot the law of God, practised swearing, lying, killing, stealing, and committing adultery; they had troops of robbers among them; and there was no truth nor mercy, nor knowledge of God in the land, iv. 1, 2, 6.

II. AN AFFECTIONATE EXHORTATION URGED. "O Israel, return unto the Lord thy God." Here observe,

1. *The persons addressed*;—"Israel." A people once highly favored, but now degraded. Had the prophet used language expressive of their moral character, he might have designated them by the most odious epithets; but he calls them "Israel," to remind them of what they once were, the import of their name, and the high honor which God had put upon them. What affectionate men were God's prophets! How faithful, and yet how kind!

2. *The nature of the address*;—"Return." This supposes previous wandering. The people of Israel had wandered like a treacherous wife, who had forsaken her husband, Hos. ii. 5; they had gone after other lovers, but disappointment had attended them, ver. 6. Now the prophet invites them to "return." Have we acted the part of Israel? Oh let us return—now—with all our hearts—in the spirit of faith and prayer.

3. *The object to whom they were to return*;—"Unto the Lord thy God." The Lord, who has the sole right to rule and govern thee; "thy God," who called himself thy God, Psal. i. 7;—who acted towards thee as a God, in defending thee in danger,—comforting thee in distress,—directing thee in difficulty,—and providing for thee in necessity. Gratitude, affection, justice, honor, safety, and comfort, should induce those who have wandered from God to return to him.

III. INSTRUCTIVE DIRECTION ADMINISTERED;—"Take with you words," &c. Prayer may be offered unto God without words, 1 Sam. i. 13. But Israel was here directed to take *words*,—not bullocks nor sacrifices; these we may not all have in possession, but *words* we have at will. *Words of sincerity* should be taken, when we approach to God, not speaking what we never mean; hypocrisy is hateful in his sight. *Appropriate words*, such as best accord with our feelings and desires. *Words of humble confession.* David, Daniel, and the prodigal, will furnish us with words of confession. *Words of petition.* These the prophet records; say unto him, "Take away all iniquity." Iniquity was the cause of their fall, and in returning to God they were to pray for its removal.

1. *Take it away from our affections, that we may no longer love it.* Sinners love sin; there is a bent and tendency towards it in the carnal mind. God alone can take away that desire after sin from our hearts.

2. *From our consciences, that we may no longer labor under the burden of it.* Sin induces guilt, and renders us liable to punishment; God threatens sinners with hell. Awakened sinners groan under the burden of sin, and say, "Take away all iniquity."

3. *From our lives, that it may not have dominion over us.* God has promised to redeem Israel from all his iniquities, *Psa. cxxx. 8.* "How shall we that are dead to sin live any longer therein?" *Rom. vi. 2.*

4. *From our hearts, that we may be dead to it.* This is the subject of the prayer;—"Take away all iniquity." God can do this, for he is almighty; and because he directs us to pray for it, we may infer his willingness to answer our prayer.

"Receive us graciously." This is another part of the prayer which Israel was directed to offer unto God.

1. *Receive our prayers graciously.* One of the heaviest judgments which God can inflict upon sinners in this world, is to reject their prayers. This he may justly do, and laugh at our calamity, &c. It is all of grace that he deigns to receive our prayers.

2. *Receive our persons graciously.* Receive us into thy family. Sin has rendered us aliens and enemies, and we are by our iniquities children of wrath; but receive us, and put us among thy children. Receive us into thy favor. Our iniquities have rendered us liable to thy heavy displeasure; but oh forgive us, heal our backslidings. Receive us into union with thyself. Our iniquities have separated between us and thee; but cast us not off from thy presence. In the margin this is read, "Take away all iniquity, and give good." God is good—all good; and he gives good; and "no good thing will he withhold from them that walk uprightly."

IV. RETURNS OF GRATITUDE EXPRESSED;—"So will we render the calves of our lips." By this expression we understand the fruit of our lips, "giving thanks to his name," *Heb. xiii. 15.* When the Jews received signal favors from God, they were accustomed to offer animal sacrifices, such as calves and bullocks, as returns of gratitude, *1 Kings iii. 4, 15;* but "we will render the calves of our lips." "Thou desirest not sacrifice," &c., *Ps. li. 16.*

1. *Gratitude is a debt which all owe to God.* All the benefits with which our being is crowned, flow from God, and flow freely, liberally and constantly. Gratitude is the expression of obligation; and as our obligations to God know no bounds, our gratitude should know no end.

2. *Gratitude is a debt which gracious souls are ready to pay.* Fully to discharge this debt is impossible; but, like the woman in the gospel, they do what they can. When God takes away our iniquity, and receives us graciously, our first feelings are those of praise, *Isa. xxxviii. 18, 19.* As a proof that we "render the calves of our lips," let us render the homage of our hearts, and the actions of our lives.

Learn, 1. *That neither our civil nor religious privileges will preclude the possibility of falling by iniquity.* Whoever rose higher by the former than Israel? or whoever sunk deeper by the latter?

2. *That those who have fallen by iniquity should be induced to return to the Lord their God.* God invites them to return—promises to receive them—and gives direction by the prophet in the text how they should return.

3. *Those whose iniquity is taken away should individually say, "Bless the Lord, O my soul." Psa. ciii. 2, 3.*

EXHORTATIONS

JESUS WEeping OVER PERISHING SINNERS.

Luke xix. 41, 42. And when he was come near, he beheld the city, and wept over it, saying, If thou hadst known, even thou, at least in this thy day, the things which belong unto thy peace! but now they are hid from thine eyes. (Sk.)

1. WHEN we see a man weeping, of whom but little is known by us, it is natural for us to set our imagination in exercise, that we may be able to ascertain the probable cause or causes of his distress. We very readily suppose that he is a man *weak* in his *intellects*, and liable to be thus affected by every unpleasant occurrence, however trifling;—or he has committed some heinous *crime*, and his conscience is wrung by bitter remorse;—or he is now overwhelmed by the pressure of some recent *affliction* in his *circumstances*;—or some great calamity has befallen his *friends*, and the tears we behold are tears of sympathy.

2. Our text exhibits to our view a man in tears. But be not hasty in your conclusions: these tears are not indicative of *mental imbecility*, for in him dwelt all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.—These tears are not expressive of *remorse*, for in him was no sin, and in all his deportment he was holy, harmless, and undefiled.—These tears are not occasioned by *personal afflictions*, they have no reference to himself.—They are not occasioned by the calamities of his *friends*, for their case, even at the worst, is very hopeful.—Why then does he weep? The reason is, he sees his *enemies*, his open and avowed enemies, obstinately bent on their own destruction. It is this that fills his heart with sorrow, his eyes with tears, and his mouth with this affecting language. “When he came near,” on his last visit to Jerusalem, “He beheld the city,” that city, the inhabitants of which had despised, rejected, and reviled him, and were now forming designs against his life. Well knowing the dreadful judgments by which this city would soon be laid desolate, he most compassionately lamented “and wept over it, saying, If thou hadst known,” or, “oh that thou hadst known, even thou, in this thy day, the things which belong unto thy peace! but now they are hid from thine eyes.” This lamentation, it appears, was lost on the Jews in general, but it is recorded for our instruction; and under the divine blessing it may prove highly beneficial to us, by teaching us,

I. THAT GOSPEL BLESSINGS ARE CONDUCTIVE TO THE PEACE OF MANKIND. They are the things which belong unto our peace. Here let us more particularly observe,

1. *What those things are to which our Lord refers.* That they are those blessings which he had called “the lost sheep of the house of Israel” to enjoy, but which they had obstinately rejected, is evident from similar complaints, see Matt. xiii. 14, 15; xxiii. 37; John v. 40. They include the blessings of grace in this world; and the blessings of glory in the eternal state.—*The blessings of grace in this world.* Deliverance—from bondage, condemnation, and guilty fears, Psa. cxvi. 16; Isa. xii. 1; Psa. xxxiv. 4; and holiness—both of heart and life, Obadiah 17; Rom. vi. 22.—*The blessings of glory in the eternal state.* An eternal life of rest, felicity, honor, and security, Rom. ii. 6, 7. Let us also observe,

2. *How these things are conducive to our peace.* They belong unto our peace as they produce sweet tranquility of mind, Eccl. ii. 26. This arises from *peace with God*, Rom. v. 1; *peace of conscience*, 2 Cor. i. 12; a *peaceable disposition*, James iii. 18; the *joy of victory*, Rom. viii. 37; 1 Cor. xv. 57; and the joy of *hope*, Rom. v. 2. and xiv. 17. Our text teaches us,

II. THAT THESE BLESSINGS MUST BE KNOWN TO BE ENJOYED :—"Oh that thou hadst known," &c. The knowledge thus necessary, must be,

1. *A speculative knowledge*; that is, we must have a correct view of them, as they are exhibited in God's word,—For we are naturally *without* them, Rom. iii. 16—18.—We must *seek* them to *obtain* them, Job xxii. 21; Isa. xxvii. 5.—And we must *understand* them in order that we may *seek* them aright: we must understand the nature of them; the necessity of them; and the way to obtain them, Prov. xix. 2. The knowledge here required must also be,

2. *An experimental knowledge*. This is evident—From the *testimony of inspired apostles*, 2 Cor. v. 1; xiii. 5; 1 John v. 19.—And from the *nature of gospel blessings*; spiritual sight, liberty, and health, must be experienced to be enjoyed. Our text teaches us,

III. THAT A SEASON IS AFFORDED US FOR ACQUIRING THE KNOWLEDGE OF THESE BLESSINGS.

1. This season is here called *our day*, because it is the time in which we are called to labor for the blessings of peace, John vi. 27; Phil. ii. 12, 13; 2 Pet. iii. 14.

2. This season is *favorable for seeking the things here recommended*;—for they are set *before* us, Deut. xxx. 19, 29;—we have *strength* promised to seek them with, Isa. xl. 31;—and we have *light* to seek them in, John xii. 36. Hence, we should also recollect,

3. *This season is limited*; it is only a *day*. It began with the exercise of our reason; it may be terminated either by death, the general judgment, the loss of our mental powers, or the departure of God's Spirit, Jer. vi. 8; and while it remains, it should be promptly improved, John xii. 35; Matt. xxiv. 44. Our text also teaches us, with respect to gospel blessings,

IV. THAT IT IS GOD'S WILL THEY SHOULD BE ENJOYED BY US. This is certain,

1. *From the wish of Christ*;—"O that thou hadst known," &c. Such a wish we find often repeated by God in his word, and expressed in the kindest manner; see Deut. v. 29, xxxii. 29; Isa. xlviii. 18.

2. *From the tears of Christ*. These demonstrate the *sincerity* of his wish, Deut. xxxii. 4;—the great *importance* of *godliness*, 1 Tim. iv. 8;—and the *dreadful doom* of *impenitent sinners*, Rom. ii. 8, 9.

3. *And from the visitations of Christ*; see ver. 44. He visited us by his *incarnation*, Luke i. 78, 79;—and he still visits us by the strivings of his *Spirit*—the gifts of his *providence*, Acts xiv. 17—and the ministry of his *word*, 2 Cor. v. 20; Luke xix. 10. Hence we learn,

V. THAT ALL WHO SEEK THESE BLESSINGS ARIGHT, WILL OBTAIN THEM.

1. *To seek them aright, is to seek them as God requires*:—with respect to *time*, now while our day of visitation lasts, Job xxii. 21:—with respect to *manner*—by faith in Christ, John v. 28, 29;—by receiving Christ, John i. 12;—coming to God by him, Heb. vii. 25;—and abiding in him, 1 John ii. 28.

2. *All who thus seek them will certainly obtain them*; for Christ *died* for the chief of sinners, Zech. xiii. 1. He *calls* them to seek salvation, Isa. i. 16—18; and *engages* not to *reject* them, John vi. 37. Only those shall *perish* who despise him, Acts xiii. 41; and all such must *perish*, because they obstinately reject the only remedy, Prov. xxix. 1; John iii. 17. Hence our text finally teaches us,

VI. THAT THE REJECTION OF THESE BLESSINGS IS PUNISHED WITH DESTRUCTION.

1. *This is evident from Scripture*:—for all mankind by nature are sinners, Rom. iii. 23. As sinners, they are exposed to destruction, Prov. x. 29; and by impenitence, the only means of salvation are neglected, Heb. x. 26, 27.

2. *And it is evident from facts*. These Jews, through impenitence, became the victims of divine vengeance; and so must all impenitent sinners, 2 Thess. i. 7—9.

APPLICATION.

1. *Examine yourselves*. Do you enjoy the things which belong unto your peace? Gal. vi. 4,

2. *If not, seek them—on God's terms*, Acts xx. 21;—with your *whole heart*, Jer. xxix. 13;—and *without delay*, Job. xxxvi. 18.

3. *If thus seeking, expect salvation—from Christ's all-sufficiency*, Heb. vii. 25; and from his *goodness*. Recollect he visits you—weeps over you—wishes your salvation—has bled for you—and now waits on you, Rev. iii. 20.

PROMPTITUDE OF CHOICE RECOMMENDED.

Joshua xxiv. 15.—Choose you this day whom you will serve. (Sk.)

THE text contains a most important piece of advice, addressed to a highly privileged people, by a most distinguished character, on a very memorable occasion. The speaker was Joshua, the successor of Moses, who was invested with his miraculous powers, and high prerogative. The period at which the text was spoken, was when he contemplated the near approach of death; and the individuals to whom it was addressed, were the elders of Israel, their heads, their judges, and their officers. There are seasons when the force of truth acquires additional energy; when the time, the place, and the circumstances, combine their influence to give permanency to the impression produced in the mind; and the period before us was one of those occasions. Imagine a venerable old man, grown grey-headed in the service of his God, and in active benevolence for the good of his nation; a man high in repute for his personal prowess, for his uniform and consistent character, for the splendor of his talents, for his disinterested integrity, rehearsing in the ears of the heads of Israel, the wonderful conduct of God towards them, reminding them of their degraded origin, "Your fathers dwelt on the other side of the flood," &c., ver. 2. Of the plagues inflicted on Egypt for their sakes, ver. 6, 7. How God defeated the design of Balaam, who came to curse the people, but was constrained to bless them altogether, ver. 9, 10. And he also reminded them of what God had done for them since they inhabited the land of Canaan. "Now therefore," said he, "fear the Lord," &c., "and if it seem evil unto you to serve the Lord, choose you," &c. Three things we will notice, the *act*, the *period*, and the *motives* for choice.

I. LET US NOTICE THE ACT OF CHOICE.

1. *Our choice should be divine in its object*. We should choose the Lord for our God. Choose God for our *sovereign*, that he may govern us, and that we may submit to his authority, and dispensations. For our *guide*, that

he may direct us amidst all the intricate snares of this world. For our *husband*, that we may be married to him. For our *portion*, that we may be satisfied with his favor, and for our *pattern*, that we may imitate him. O how many choose other objects!

2. *Our choice should be rational in its character.* It should be the result of rational conviction; the religion of some people lies solely in their passions, their hearts have been affected, their passions touched, and without counting the cost, or calling in the aid of their intellectual faculties, they commence their religious course, and join some body of professing christians; but alas! when persecution comes, they are offended, and their profession vanishes as the morning cloud, and as the early dew. Let us wisely consider what we are doing, so that we may be able to give an answer to every man who asketh us a reason of the hope that is in us.

3. *Our choice should be decisive in its nature.* In reference to many things in human life, we are called upon to hesitate in making our choice; and after we have made it, we are left in doubt as to its result. "For who knoweth what is good for man in this life?" But this cannot be the case, in reference to the subject before us. We all know that if we do not choose God for our portion, we must be inevitably ruined; and under the influence of this conviction, we should be so decided in our choice, as not even to have a longing wish for the world, or a single thought of returning again to its vain pursuits in quest of happiness.

4. *Our choice should be practical in its operations;*—"Choose you this day whom ye will serve." Having chosen God, you must serve him—*totally*, with soul and body; *uniformly*, not merely on the Sabbath, or among the friends of piety, but always and every where; *consistently* evince that you serve him. "Let others see your good works."

II. LET US NOTICE THE PERIOD OF OUR CHOICE;—"Choose you *this day*," &c.

1. *We should make our choice this day, because of the criminal neglect of which we have been guilty.* As soon as reason dawned upon our minds, and we were capable of making a choice, we ought to have chosen God for our portion, and have been uniform in our attachment to him, from that time to the present. But the days of our youth passed away in the total neglect of God; we purposed when arrived at maturity, to choose the good part; but alas! here also many of us failed, and now some of us are old, and probably have never yet been decidedly pious. Oh what culpable neglect attaches to us!

2. *We should make our choice this day, from a view of the shortness and uncertainty of our time.* "Time is short," our days are as a hand-breadth, swifter than a post. We may die to-day, our departure may be sudden. Death often gives no signal of his approach; but should we have a lingering affliction, that is not a proper time to choose whom we shall serve.

3. *We should make our choice this day, because the present is the only time when God has promised the aids of his Spirit.* The power of choice is from God; that power is the effect of his gracious operations in us. But his Spirit will not always strive with us. God may be provoked to give us up to a reprobate mind. "Now is the accepted time."

4. *We should make our choice this day, because the difficulty of choosing will increase in proportion to our neglect of it.* Sin is a disease; the longer that disease prevails, the more inveterate it becomes. Sin is slavery; the longer we continue in it, the faster our chains are riveted, and the more difficult it is to burst them asunder.

III. LET US NOTICE THE MOTIVES FOR CHOICE. Joshua gave this charge to Israel; it is given to us now.

1. *The capacity which we have for choice, is a reason for its exercise.* God gives nothing in vain. Had we ranked no higher than brutes, and possessed nothing superior to blind instinct, the power of choice would have been precluded; but we are men, endowed with rational faculties, and capable under the influence of the divine Spirit of choosing God, and serving him.

2. *The perilous state in which we are without this choice, is another motive.* How miserable is a man without God! He who has never chosen God for his portion, has no interest in him, no union with him, no salvation from him. God is to him no refuge, Christ no Saviour, the Holy Ghost no comforter: heaven is no inheritance of his; ruin must inevitably seize his soul, if he continues in a course of sin.

3. *The happiness that results from our choosing God, should prompt us to comply with the requisition in the text.* He who has chosen God is in a state of safety and tranquility. His guilt is pardoned, his soul is renewed, his hope is like an anchor, sure and steadfast, cast within the veil, whither the forerunner is for him entered. The Lord's portion is his people, and Jacob is the lot of his inheritance.

Conclude by inquiring, What choice have we made? Where are our affections placed? Whom do we serve? What is our chief good? Some worship mammon. Some serve the devil. Expostulate with such. Why make such a choice? The world cannot make you happy. With the devil you will be tormented if you die in sin. Exhort those who have chosen God to cleave to him. Amen.

OUR LORD'S CONDESCENSION TO SINNERS.

Rev. iii. 20. Behold, I stand at the door, and knock: if any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and sup with him, and he with me. (S. S.)

THE ways of man are often made a standard whereby to judge of God—
Hence many foolishly “think him to be such an one as themselves”

But “his thoughts and ways are infinitely above ours”

This is remarkably manifest in the passage before us—

It is usual for inferiors to wait on their superiors—

The greater their inferiority, the more patience is expected of them—

But here the God of heaven waits upon his sinful creatures—

The declaration is made even to the Lukewarm Laodiceans—

It unfolds to our view,

I. THE WONDERFUL CONDESCENSION OF CHRIST TO SINNERS.

He represents himself as coming to them to be their guest—

But we must understand his words in a spiritual sense—

The hearts of natural men are shut against Christ.

Mankind have their hearts full of vile lusts and passions—

They utterly exclude Christ from his rightful habitation—

They bar the door against him by prejudice and unbelief—

He however condescends to seek admittance into them.

He “knocks” in various ways “at the door” of their hearts—

He intreats, promises, threatens, and expostulates by his *word*—

He awakens attention by the secret energy of his *Spirit*—
 He calls also by alarming dispensations of his *providence*—
 But the generality disregard his voice.
 They are asleep, and even “dead in trespasses and sins”—
 If awakened, they endeavor to lull themselves asleep again—
 If they cannot do this, they rest in frivolous excuses, Cant. v. 2, 3.
 Thus do they studiously and determinately resist his will—
 Nevertheless he “stands” patiently waiting their leisure.
 He might well depart at their first refusal—
 But he knows how dreadful their state would then be—
 He therefore “waiteth to be gracious” unto them—
 On many he has waited a long series of years, Acts xiii. 18.
 Of most it may be said as of Israel of old, Rom. x. 21.
 This is a fact worthy of our highest admiration.
 Well might he call us to “behold” it with wonder—
 How wonderful, that the Creator should so condescend to a creature!—
 How wonderful, that the Judge should become suitor to the criminal!—
 How wonderful, that the self-sufficient God should seek in such a way to
 bless those who are inexpressibly vile and helpless!—
 This must excite our admiration to all eternity—
 The adorable goodness expressed in it will appear further by considering,
 II. THE MERCIES HE DESIRES TO IMPART TO THEM.
 He requires nothing of sinners but what he will enable them to perform.
 He looks for no worthiness or merit in them—
 He only desires that they “hear his voice, and open to him”—
 He will himself “unstop their ears,” and “incline their hearts”—
 If indeed they obstinately persist in rejecting him, they cut themselves off
 from any hope in his mercy—
 Upon their yielding to his solicitations, he will bless them.
 The metaphor of a guest is still kept up—
 It is a common metaphor in scripture, John xiv. 23.
 The “supping” implies the most familiar intercourse with the soul—
 This our Lord will vouchsafe to those who open their hearts to him—
 He will delight himself in the exercise of their graces, Cant. iv. 16.
 He will communicate to them his richest consolations—
 He will cause them to exclaim with the prophet, Zech. ix. 17.
 Nor will he withhold these mercies on account of their past conduct.
 He will with equal readiness become the guest of all—
 No unworthiness or past obduracy shall hinder him—
 He has declared this in the most express terms, “If *any* man.” See
 also Isa. lv. 1; Rev. xxii. 17.
 He has proved it in the most remarkable instances, 2 Chron. xxxiii. 9, 12,
 13; 1 Tim. i. 13, 16:
 There is a cloud of living witnesses ready to attest it—
 We shall conclude with an ADDRESS to
 1. Those who are living in a careless state.
 You are yet strangers to the heavenly guest—
 But this arises only from your own negligence and supineness—
 Christ has been long knocking at the door of your hearts—
 Every vile lust has been admitted, whilst HE has stood without—
 May you never have that threatening fulfilled to you! Prov. i. 24—31
 Let every one obey the prophet’s exhortation, Isa. lv. 6.
 2. Those who are awakened from it.

What a mercy is it that you have heard the Saviour's voice!—

Let it be your daily endeavor to open your hearts to him—

Guard against unbelief, which above all bars the door against him—

Let the sins which are offensive to him be put away—

Then shall the fact which so offended the Jews be realized in you, Luke xix. 7.

Thus shall you enjoy the most endearing fellowship with Jesus—

And you shall ere long "sup with him" in a better place, Rev. xix. 9.

AN EXHORTATION TO HOLINESS.

1 Peter ii. 11, 12.—Dearly beloved, I beseech you, as strangers and pilgrims, abstain from fleshly lusts, which war against the soul; having your conversation honest among the Gentiles: that whereas they speak against you as evil doers, they may, by your good works which they shall behold, glorify God in the day of visitation. (S. S.)

THE privileges of a sincere christian are exceeding great—

And the possession of them is secured to him by God himself, 1 Pet. i. 5.

His security however does not supersede the need of watchfulness—

On the contrary he is called to a continual warfare—

He needs therefore to be frequently reminded of his duty—

Hence Peter, having set forth the honors and privileges of God's people, proceeds to press upon them the practice of holiness—

We propose to explain and enforce the apostle's exhortation.

I. EXPLAIN

The manner in which it is introduced is worthy of notice.

A concern for the souls of men is characteristic of a pious minister—

Paul and John were eminent patterns in this respect—1 Thess. iii. 8; 3 John 4.

Peter exemplifies it in the passage before us—

He unites the tenderness of a father with the fidelity of an apostle—

The first part of it respects their "abstinence from fleshly lusts."

Impurity, intemperance, sloth, &c., are fleshly lusts—

Nor can any abstain from them without much prayer and vigilance—

This is enforced by two very important considerations.

Christians are "strangers and pilgrims" in the world—Psa. xxxix. 12; Heb. xi. 13.

This consideration strongly enforces abstinence from sin—It shews the folly of the Epicurean system, 1 Cor. xv. 32.

Moreover fleshly lusts "war against the soul"—

They destroy its dignity, its peace, its liberty, its salvation—

This should make us extremely careful to abstain from them—

The latter part of the exhortation respects positive holiness.

The christians were scattered through the Gentile world—

Their conduct therefore would be watched with a jealous eye—

On this account the apostle cautions them with respect to the whole of their deportment—

He exhorts them to maintain an honorable conduct in all things—

A very powerful motive is suggested to confirm this also—

Christians were universally represented as the worst of men, 1 Cor. iv. 13

An unbecoming conduct in them would have confirmed this prejudice—
 But a blameless conversation might conciliate esteem—
 It might even be the means of converting their persecutors—
 It would do so if God at the same time should visit them with his mercy*—
 In this case it would cause them to glorify God—
 This consideration might well operate as a motive to holiness—
 St. Peter elsewhere urges it in this very light, 1 Pet. iii. 1.

II. ENFORCE.

Christians, however advanced, have need of this exhortation—
 We therefore would address it to you with all earnestness—
 We would not however forget the affection and tenderness due to you—
 First then we beseech you to abstain from fleshly lusts.
 Who amongst you is free from their baneful influence?
 Who does not see that abstinence from them is necessary?—
 Guard then against their first risings in the heart—
 Beg of God that you may have grace to mortify them all—
 We intreat you to consider,

1. Your present state and condition in the world.

You are here only as "strangers and pilgrims"—
 You profess to be seeking "a city that hath foundations"—
 You do not take up your rest in an inn, when on a journey—
 Do not then retard your progress heaven-wards by sensual gratifications—

2. The dreadful tendency of fleshly lusts.

Who has not experienced the misery they bring upon us?—
 Who does not know the consequence of indulging them?—
 Let this thought make you flee from them with abhorrence—
 We further beseech you to maintain an honorable conversation.
 A few holy actions or dispositions will not suffice—
 Religious must operate uniformly and universally—
 Let the whole of your conversation therefore be blameless, Phil. ii. 15.
 Nor need you despair of walking thus if you depend on Christ Phil. iv. 13.
 For consider,

The tendency of such a life to remove prejudice.

The world is as ready to speak evil of christians as ever—

Nor will they regard your conduct in the church or closet—

They will enquire how you fill up your relative duties—

The sight of your blameless conduct will silence them, 1 Pet. ii. 15, and
 iii. 16.

The possibility that others may be converted by means of it.

Certainly many would be hardened by misconduct on your part—

On the contrary, some may be won by your good conversation—

At all events God will be glorified by means of your good works—

Let this stimulate you to unwearied watchfulness and care.

* This seems to be meant by "the day of visitation:" See Luke i. 68, 78.

PAUL'S DISCOURSE BEFORE FELIX.

Acts xxiv. 25.—And as he reasoned of righteousness, temperance, and judgment to come Felix trembled, and answered, Go thy way for this time; when I have a convenient season, I will call for thee. (S. S.)

MEN usually persist in sin without duly reflecting on its consequences—
Hence the peace which they enjoy, notwithstanding they are exposed to the displeasure of the Almighty—

Yet the voice of warning and reproof will sometimes alarm them—

Too often, however, the alarm is only of short duration—

This was the case of Felix, when awakened by the preaching of Paul,

I. THE SUBJECTS OF THE APOSTLES DISCOURSE.

He was sent for to explain the principles he professed—

But he was not satisfied with gratifying the curiosity of his hearers—

He endeavored to reach their consciences, and convince them of their sins—

On this occasion he spoke of “righteousness, temperance, and judgment to come.”

These subjects were well adapted to his audience—

Felix and Drusilla were both of an abandoned character*—

They needed to be “persuaded by the terrors of the Lord”—

Nor was it probable they would regard the tidings of salvation, unless they were first made sensible that they were lost sinners, Matt. ix. 12, 13.

Hence the apostle endeavored to prepare their minds for the gospel—

On these subjects he “reasoned.”

He shewed the nature and extent of the duties—

He shewed the evil and danger of transgressing them—

He shewed the certainty and strictness of the future judgment—

A suitable lesson for avarice, iniquity, and oppression!—

And suitable, too, to every child of man!—

What degree of success attended this effort will appear from,

II. THE EFFECTS IT PRODUCED.

We read not of Drusilla being at all affected with the word—

But we are told of Felix, that he “trembled.”

What a wonderful sight! the judge trembling before his prisoner!—

He had sinned in unnumbered instances, and was obnoxious to God's wrath—

He now heard of the day of retribution, and of the sentence of condemnation under which he lay—

And now, though he feared no earthly tribunal, he was shaken with terror and with guilt—

And was there not cause for trembling?

He was not, however, faithful to his convictions.

One might have hoped that he would have cried out like those of old, Acts ii. 37.—

But he sought to efface the impression made upon his mind—

He put off his attention to his soul to a more “convenient season.”

What madness was here, to depend on the morrow in a concern of such importance!—

*Felix had induced Drusilla to forsake her own husband, and to marry him. he was moreover exceedingly avaricious and oppressive.

What season could be so convenient as *that* he then enjoyed?—

His conscience was then affected, and the Spirit was striving with him—

Moreover, he had then a faithful and inspired instructor before him—

Was he more likely to repent when he had seared his conscience, quenched the Spirit, yielded to Satan, and confirmed his evil habits?—

But his future interviews with the apostle was of no avail—

One of the last acts of his government was marked with oppression and avarice—

Nor did he spare the innocence which he confessed, and admired, Ver. 26, 27.—

A melancholy instance of judicial blindness!—

APPLICATION.

Let this history serve as a CAUTION to us,

All of us have known, in some measure, the motions of God's Spirit—

All of us have felt, at times, some general apprehensions respecting the account which we must give at the day of judgment—

But how many have silenced their convictions, in hopes of finding some more convenient season for attending to them!—

And how many have died before the hoped-for opportunity arrived!—

Let us beware of this device of Satan, whereby he upholds his kingdom in the world*—

Let us remember that the same temptations will recur, and the same motives influence us at future periods—

Let us attend to that salutary advice of the apostle, Heb. iii. 13–15.

And let us seek, without delay, that godly sorrow which worketh repentance unto salvation, 2 Cor. vii. 10.

AN EXHORTATION TO CARELESS SINNERS.

Eph. v. 14. Awake, thou that sleepest, and arise from the dead, and Christ shall give thee light. (S. S.)

THERE is a harmony in the Scriptures which many overlook and destroy—

Detached passages are often wrested to establish a favorite system†—

But the various truths of God should be viewed as they stand connected with each other—

There would then be diversity indeed, but no contrariety between them‡—

This observation will throw light, as on many other parts of Scripture, so on that before us in particular; in which we have—

I. A COMMAND.

The Scripture abounds with useful and instructive metaphors—

Our state is here represented under the images of sleep and death—

* He does not tempt any to resolve that they will never repent; but takes the more plausible method of insinuating that they will have a more convenient season for repenting.

† Calls to duty are supposed to imply the sufficiency of man to do the will of God; while the confessions or petitions of the saints, and the promises of divine aid given to them, are brought to justify a negligence in the use of means.

‡ God gives a *command*, Ezek. xviii. 31. David, knowing his duty, and feeling his inability to perform it, had long before presented this to God in the form of a *petition*, Ps. li. 10. And God, to encourage such applications to him, *promises* to work in us that which he requires of us, Ezek. xxxvi. 26

Sleep implies a state of *inactivity* and *security*.

Men are busily employed about their worldly concerns—

But a lamentable supineness prevails with respect to spiritual things—

The generality do not apprehend their souls to be in any danger—

Death, judgment, heaven, and hell, do not seem worthy their notice—

God's threatenings against them are denounced without effect—

They are like Jonah, sleeping in the midst of a storm—

Hence they are described as "at ease from their youth," Jer. xlviii. 11.

To the same effect is the testimony of him that searcheth the heart, Ps.

x. 4, 5.

Death includes the ideas of *impotence* and *corruption*.

An inanimate body cannot perform any of the functions of life—

It has within itself the seeds and principles of corruption—

The soul also, till quickened from the dead, is in a state of impotence—

It is incapable of spiritual action or discernment, John xv. 5; 1 Cor. ii. 14.

Its powers and faculties are altogether vitiated, Rom. vii. 18.

Whatever is loathsome and offensive to God proceeds from it, Mark vii.

21, 22.

So true is that humiliating declaration! Job. xv. 14—16.

Yet, notwithstanding this state appears so desperate, we must address to every one that is under it, the command, "Awake," &c.

Your inactivity and security involve you in the deepest guilt—

Your corruption of heart and life provokes the majesty of God—

Nor is your impotence any excuse for your disobedience—

It is your love of sin that disables you for duty—

Nor is God deprived of his right to command, though you have lost your power to obey—

Let every one then strive to comply with this heavenly call—

They who exert their feeble powers may expect divine assistance*—

To convince us that none shall fail who use the appointed means, God enforces his command with

II. A PROMISE.

Sleep and death are states of intellectual *darkness*—

Hence *light* is promised to those who obey the divine mandate—

Light in Scripture imports knowledge, Isa. viii. 20; holiness, 1 John i. 7; comfort, Ps. xcvi. 11; and glory, Col. i. 12.

And all these blessings shall they receive from Christ, the fountain of light, Mal. iv. 2; John i. 9.

Knowledge.

Spiritual knowledge every natural man stands in need of—

Nor is it attainable by the teaching of men, or the efforts of genius, Matt. xi. 25.

We can receive it from none but Christ, Matt. xi. 27.

Hence Christ invites us to come to him for it, Matt. xi. 29.

Nor shall an application to him ever fail of success, Psa. xxv. 9; Prov.

ii. 3—6.

Holiness.

A despair of attaining this deters many from seeking it—

They think their inveterate habits cannot be rooted out, Jer. ii. 25.

But Christ is our "sanctification" as well as our wisdom, 1 Cor. i. 30.

* See Matt. xii. 10, 13. The man with the withered hand was unable to stretch it forth; but in attempting to obey, he was endued with strength.

His very name encourages us to expect deliverance from him, **Matt. i. 21.**
 And he will fulfil the promises which he has made to this effect. **Mic. vii.**
19; Isa. i. 25.

Comfort.

A sense of guilt shall yield to holy joy, **Isa. xxix. 19;** and **lxi. 3.**

Deplored weakness shall be succeeded by a divine energy, **Isa. xxxv. 5, 6.**

Our delight in him shall be spiritual and exalted, **Isa. li. 11,** and **lviii. 11**

It shall far transcend all earthly pleasures, **Psa. lxxxiv. 10,** and **iv. 6, 7.**

Glory.

Our Lord will not confine his blessings to this world, **Psa. lxxxiv. 11.**

He will raise his people to thrones of glory, **Rev. iii. 21.**

He will cause them to participate his own inheritance, **Rom. viii. 17.**

He will be the ground and object of their joy for ever, **Isa. lx. 19 20.**

APPLICATION.

What greater encouragement can any one desire?—

What richer promises can any one conceive?—

How suited are they to our necessities!—

Let every one consider the command as addressed to himself; "**Awake, Thou**"—

Let all our powers and faculties be called forth to action—

In exerting ourselves let us expect the promised aid—

Thus shall we be eternal monuments of Christ's power and grace—

CHRIST'S OFFER OF THE SPIRIT.

John vii. 37, 38.—In the last day, that great day of the feast, Jesus stood and cried, saying,
 If any man thirst, let him come unto me, and drink. He that believeth on me, as the
 scripture hath said, out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water. (S. S.)

OUR blessed Lord incessantly labored for the salvation of men—

Nor could their ungrateful returns at all divert him from his purpose—

His life was sought, and he knew that persons were sent to apprehend him.

Yet, instead of rejecting them with abhorrence, he sought to win them by
 love—

And importuned them to accept his richest blessings—

His address to them on this occasion contained,

I. AN INVITATION.

The time and manner of the invitation are worthy of notice.

This was a day of peculiar sanctity, and of uncommon festivity*—

And it seems that some customs, not required in the original institutions
 of the law, obtained among the Jews at that time†—

* It was the eighth and last day of the feast of tabernacles, **Lev. xxiii. 34. 36.**

† It is said that on this day they went annually to the pool of Siloam, and drawing water
 from thence returned with it in procession to the temple, where they poured it out with all
 possible demonstrations of joy. At what time this custom arose, it is not easy to deter-
 mine; but probably it commenced after the Babylonish captivity; and was adopted in refer-
 ence to that prediction, **Isaiah xii. 3.** Nor is the design of it precisely known: but it seems
 most likely that they then commemorated the giving of water out of the rock in the wilder-
 ness and called upon God for rain, which was so necessary to them at that season. Per-
 haps the more spiritual among them, might pray also for those spiritual blessings, which
 their promised Messiah was appointed to bestow. These circumstances served as the foun-
 dation of our Lord's address, and reflect much light upon it.

Happy to improve the opportunity, Jesus stood in the most conspicuous place, and, with an exalted voice, claimed their attention—

And, despising equally the censures of the uncharitable, and the persecutions of the proud, he made them fresh overtures of mercy—

The invitation itself was beyond measure gracious and kind.

While they only panted for his blood, he longed for their salvation—

He pointed himself out to them as the only fountain of living waters—

And assured them of his readiness to impart whatsoever they stood in need of—

He excepted none from his offers, provided they did but “thirst” for his blessings—

What could have a more conciliatory effect on his blood-thirsty murderers?

Lest, however, his invitations should be slighted, he enforced it with,

II. A PROMISE.

He first explained what he meant by “coming to him.”

It was not a mere outward, but an inward and spiritual application, that he wished them to make to him—

They were to “believe in *him*,” as possessing all fulness in himself—Col. i. 19.

And as the person appointed of the Father to convey blessings to them—Psa. lxxii. 17.

In a full persuasion of this truth they were to come to him by faith—

And to “draw water with joy from this well of salvation”—

For their encouragement he promised them a rich effusion of his Spirit.

By “living water” our Lord meant the gift of his Spirit—Ver. 39.

That “rivers of this living water should flow out of his belly,” imported, that the believer should have a constant spring of consolation within him which should refresh all who came within the sphere of his influence—

Of this blessed truth the scriptures had abundantly testified*—

And our Lord now confirmed it to them by a most solemn promise—

He assured them, as he had before done the Samaritan woman, that his communications to them should prove a source of unutterable and endless joy—John iv. 10, 13, 14.

We shall further IMPROVE this subject by addressing,

1. Those who have no desire after spiritual blessings.

Alas! how many are there who are insatiable in their thirst after earthly things; but never once desire the blessings which Christ is exalted to bestow!

Perhaps too they think that they contract no guilt by their neglect of him—

But it is with no small indignation that God speaks of their conduct, Jer. ii. 13.

Nor would their folly be hidden from themselves, if they only considered what “broken cisterns” the sources of their comfort have invariably proved—

O that they would drink of the living fountain before they experience the want of one “drop of water to cool their tongues!”—

2. Those who desire spiritual blessings, but know not where to go for them.

Many, like those whom our Lord addressed, look no further than to the outward duty—

But he directed their eyes to himself as the true Siloam, John ix. 7, the only fountain of good—

* Some, because our Lord's words are not found in scripture, *καὶ οὕτως εἶπεν ἡ γὰρ οὐκ ἔστιν ἐν τῇ σκηνῇ*; (translating *εἶπεν*, hath required) but there are many passages that speak the same effect, though not in his express terms. See Isaiah xlv. 3.

Thus must we also direct you to faith in Christ, as the one means of obtaining blessings from him—

Whichever delight you may take in duties, you must remember that ordinances are but the medium of communication between Christ and you—

And that the benefits you receive will be proportioned to the faith you exercise on him—

3. Those who desire spiritual blessings, but fear that Christ is unwilling to impart them.

Too many are discouraged because their prayers are not answered instantly—

They conclude themselves so unworthy as to have excited nothing but aversion in the heart of Christ towards them—

But are you unworthy? and were not they also to whom the text was addressed—

Have you waited long in vain? and is there not a special promise given for your encouragement?—Isa. xli. 17, 18.

Have you nothing to present to Christ in return? Then he bids you come without money and without price, Isa. lv. 1; Rev. xxii. 17.

Will it be an unparalleled act of mercy? Then is it that new thing which he has undertaken to perform, Isa. xliii. 19, 20.

Fear not then, but renew your application to him with increased fervor—

And your soul shall ere long “be as a watered garden, and like a spring of water, whose waters fail not”—Isa. lviii. 11.

THE WORK OF REDEMPTION A MOTIVE TO CONVERSION.

Isaiah xliv. 22.—Return unto me; for I have redeemed thee. (S. S.)

It is almost incredible that rational beings should ever be so stupid as to cut down a tree, and carve out of it the image of a man, and, after having roasted their food with a part of it, bow down to the residue as to a God—But it is yet more astonishing that Jehovah, having been thus insulted, should invite the offenders to mercy, and urge them to accept it—Yet it is in this connexion that the text stands; and it may well be addressed to us; since, however free we be from gross idolatry, we all have worshipped and served the creature more than the Creator—Let us then fix our attention upon,

I. THE INVITATION.

Our defection from God is too manifest to need much proof—Shades of difference there may doubtless be between different individuals; but all have turned aside from God, and gone astray like sheep that are lost—But we are here invited to return to him,

1. With penitence.

The example of the Prodigal is that which we ought to follow—The consideration of our departure from God should fill us with shame and sorrow, and our idolatrous attachment to the creature humble us in the dust—This is the direction which God himself has given us, Hos. xiv. 1, 2; and it is to such humiliation alone that his promises of acceptance are made, Job xxxiii. 27.

2. With faith.

We are not to come to God with a mind full of doubts and suspicions, but with a full persuasion of his readiness to receive us—To what purpose is it to put away our contempt of his authority, if we deny or question the riches of his grace? Our conviction of his love and mercy should be as strong as possible; Mark ix. 22, 23; and we should with the most confident assurance rely on the death of Christ as a full, perfect, and sufficient sacrifice for all our sins—

3. With love.

God delights in a willing people; he would not have us regard him as a severe Master, but as a loving Father: instead of accounting his commandments grievous, we should consider his services as perfect freedom—Our disposition should be like that of Jesus when first he undertook our cause, Ps. xl. 7, 8;—Nor indeed can any thing but an unreserved surrender of ourselves to his service prove the truth of our repentance and the sincerity of our faith—

The full import of this invitation will be seen by considering,

II. THE MOTIVE WITH WHICH IT IS ENFORCED.

It is the Lord Jesus Christ who addresses to us the word of the text, See verse 21;—Now if he had enforced his invitation with a threatening of everlasting punishment, it would have called for our most attentive regard: but the motive here urged has tenfold energy—It may be considered,

1. As a tie upon our gratitude.

The redemption of Israel from Egypt, though great, was not to be compared with that which is wrought for us by the blood of Christ—The obligations which we lie under exceed all computation—Well therefore may this stupendous mercy be urged as an inducement to return to God—Indeed, this motive duly considered, could not fail of producing the desired effect—Suppose a prodigal, having left his father's house, and squandered away his substance, had been seized by his creditors and sold for a slave: suppose his father full of compassion, had gone, at the risk of his own life, and given all that he possessed as the price of his son's redemption: suppose the son returning to his evil ways, and actually going to sell himself again to his former master; if his father should follow him, with the invitation in the text, could he fail of success? Must not his son have an heart of adamant, if he could withstand such a solicitation?—The application of this to our own case is easy; O that we may realize the idea for our good!—

2. As an encouragement under our fears.

Notwithstanding the numberless proofs which God has given us of his readiness to forgive sin, we are apt to think him hard and inexorable—But the argument here used may well dissipate our unbelieving fears—Let us conceive the Saviour, at the very instant of his resurrection, meeting one of his murderers, and importuning him, by the very wounds which he had made, to accept of mercy, and assuring him that, if he would believe, the blood that he had shed, should cleanse him from the guilt of shedding it: could that man entertain a doubt of the Saviour's willingness to shew mercy?—This very thing is done to us, whose sins were the real occasion of Jesus' death: he meets us in the word, and, with his wounds yet exhibited before our eyes, addresses us in the words of the text—Let all unworthy conceptions of him then be put away, and every soul return to him as able and willing to save us to the uttermost—

APPLICATION.

Careless sinners overlook, alas! all these considerations—But if they would consider the Saviour as addressing *them*, and as following them with *these*

words into all their retirements, yea, into all their resorts of gaiety and dissipation, what a damp would such a reflection cast on all their vicious appetites and unhallowed enjoyments!—Methinks it would not be possible for them long to withstand the influence of such a thought— — — To *backsliding professors* these words must be applied with tenfold emphasis—How pungent must such an invitation be to those, who, having once experienced the efficacy of the blood of Christ, have relapsed into a lukewarm Laodicean state!—How shocking must their ingratitude appear, and how great their folly!—Let all such, if such there be amongst us, attend to this gracious call, and return without delay, to their duties, their privileges, their enjoyments

THE NEARNESS OF SALVATION A MOTIVE TO DILIGENCE.

Rom. xiii. 11.—Now it is high time to awake out of sleep : for now is our salvation nearer than when we believed. (S. S.)

THE nearness of eternity may well excite us to improve the present hour—This is a consideration as proper for believers as for unbelievers—

By it the apostle stimulated to activity the christians at Rome—

We shall consider,

I. HIS EXHORTATION.

Persons, at their accustomed hour, arise from their beds, come forth to the light, and engage in the duties of their respective callings—

Now “it is high time” for us, (as the apostle tells us, and “we know,”)

1. To shake off our stupor.

The wise virgins, no less than the foolish, slumbered and slept—Matt.

xxv. 5.

And the most zealous christians at times are apt to grow remiss—Rev. ii. 2—4.

But it becomes us all to resist this propensity to the utmost—

And to redeem every moment of our time for God—

2. To take a view of our prospects.

What glorious prospects has God set before us in his word!—

Should we not then be surveying them with admiration and joy?—

Should we be sleeping, when Christ and heaven are open to our view?—

Luke ix. 29, 32.

Surely we should be ever standing as on Pisgah’s top—Deut. iii. 25, 27.

3. To prosecute our duties.

The christian’s work demands the utmost energy of his soul—

Unless we engage with our whole hearts, we can never discharge the offices of love—*

And are not multitudes around us “perishing for lack of knowledge?”—

Are not many of the saints also in need of consolation and support?—

What time then is there for loitering when so much is to be done?—

That the exhortation may have due influence upon us, let us consider,

II. THE ARGUMENT WITH WHICH IT IS ENFORCED.

Every day, and every hour, the believer draws “nearer to”

1. The termination of his conflicts.

* These are particularly referred to. Compare ver. 8, 10, with the text.

The nearer a racer comes to the goal, the more he stretches forth for the prize—

And shall not the christian be animated by the thought, that all his temptations, trials, difficulties are nearly ended?—

Well may he endure with patience, or exert himself with vigor, when the moment of his eternal rest is nigh at hand—

2. The period of his probation.

God has fixed the precise time for our continuance in his service—

And when that is arrived, we must “give account of our stewardship”—

Should we not then improve our talents with all diligence?—

It is in this way alone that we can hope to “give up our account with joy”—

3. The consummation of his hopes.

What does the christian look for, but a perfect conformity to God’s image, and a complete possession of his glory?—

And perhaps a few days, or hours, may bring him to the enjoyment of it all—

Blessed thought! who that entertains it, must not glow with ardent desire for the moment of his dissolution?—Phil. i. 23.

And redouble his exertions to finish the work assigned him?—2 Pet. iii. 11, 12.

APPLICATION.

It is high time also for *unbelievers* to awake; for “their damnation slumbereth not”—2 Pet. ii. 3.

If they sleep a little longer, where, oh! where will they awake?—Luke xvi. 23, 24.

With what propriety may we address you, as Joshua did the Jews!—Josh. xviii. 3.

CHAPTER III.

THE WORK OF GRACE.

OF THE PARDON OF SIN.

Psalm cxxx. 4.—There is forgiveness with thee. (H.)

THE doctrine of pardon is of pure revelation; it is not to be known by the light of nature; “As many as have sinned without law.” Rom. ii. 12. Nor is this a doctrine of the law, which gives not the least hint of pardon, nor any encouragement to expect it. As many as have sinned in the law shall be judged by the law, condemned without any hope of pardon. Rom. ii. 12. Every transgression and disobedience of the law, or word spoken by angels, received a just recompense of reward; that is, proper and righteous punishment. Heb. ii. 2. Nor does the law regard a man’s repentance, nor admit of any. He that despised Moses’s law, died without mercy! Heb. x. 28. But the doctrine of pardon is a pure doctrine of the gospel, which Christ gave commission to his disciples to preach. Luke xxiv. 47; Acts xxvi. 18. Concerning which may be observed,

I. The proof that may be given of it, that there is such a **THING AS PARDON OF SIN.**

This is asserted in the text, "There is forgiveness with thee;" and by Daniel, "To the Lord our God belong mercies and forgiveness, full and free pardon of sin." Dan. ix. 9. It is a blessing provided and promised in the covenant of grace; "I will be merciful to their unrighteousness, and their sins and their iniquities I will remember no more;" Heb. viii. 12; it is the gracious proclamation the Lord has made of his name; "The Lord, the Lord God, merciful and gracious." Ex. xxxiv. 7. Christ was set forth a propitiation, through faith in his blood, for the remission of sins. Rom. iii. 25; Matt. xxvi. 28; Eph. i. 7. And Christ is "exalted to be a prince and a Saviour, to give repentance;" Acts v. 31, and it is, by his orders, published in the gospel; to which may be added, the numerous instances of it; the Israelites, who, as they often sinned, God had compassion on them, and forgave their iniquities, Ps. lxxviii. 38; and xcix. 8, and of David, Manasseh, and others, and of Saul the blasphemer, the persecutor, and injurious person; and of other notorious sinners. Ps. xxxii. 5; 1 Tim. i. 13; Luke vii. 37, 47. It is in this way God would have his people comforted, when burdened and distressed with their guilt and sin, Isa. xl. 1, 2; Matt. ix. 2; and they are favored with a comfortable experience of it, and peace of soul from it; Ps. lxxxv. 1—3; Rom. v. 11; they are directed to pray for it, Ps. xxxii. 5; and li. 2, 7—9; Dan. ix. 19; Matt. vi. 12. Pardon of sin is a branch of redemption by the blood of Christ. Eph. i. 7.

II. The phrases by which the **PARDON OF SIN** is expressed, and which will serve to lead into the nature of it.

1. By lifting it up, and taking it away; "Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, is lifted up, taken off from him, and carried away." Ps. xxxii. 1. Sin lies upon the awakened sinner, as a burden too heavy for him to bear: which is taken away by the application of the blood of Christ.

2. By the covering of it: "Blessed is he whose sin is covered." Ps. xxxii. 1. "Thou hast forgiven the iniquity of thy people, thou hast covered all their sin." Ps. lxxxv. 2. Sin is something impure, nauseous, and abominable, in the sight of God, and provoking in the eyes of his glory, and must be covered out of sight; and this cannot be done by any thing of man's; not by his righteousness, which is but rags, a covering too narrow to be wrapped in, and can no more hide his nakedness, than Adam's fig-leaves could hide his; nay, it is no better than a spider's web; and of which it may be said, "Their webs shall not become garments." Isa. lix. 6. Sin is only covered by Christ, who is the antitype of the mercy-seat which was a lid or cover to the ark.

3. By a non-imputation of it; "Blessed is the man to whom the Lord imputeth not iniquity!" Ps. xxxii. 2, does not reckon it, nor place it to his account, nor bring any charge against him for it, nor punishes for it; but acquits him from it.

4. By a blotting of it out: in such language David prays for the forgiveness of sin; "Blot out my transgressions—and blot out all mine iniquities!" Ps. li. 1, 9, and in the same way God declares his will to forgive the sins of the people; "I, even I, am he, that blotteth out thy transgressions!" Isa. xliii. 25, which language is used either in allusion to the crossing of debt books, drawing a line over them; or to blotting out a man's hand-writing to a bond or note, obliging to payment of money; hence the phrase of "blotting out the hand-writing of ordinances that was against us." Col. ii. 14. Sins are debts, and these are numerous, and sinners poor, and unable to pay;

God for Christ's sake freely forgives; "I have blotted out, as a thick cloud." Isa. xlv. 22. Sins may be compared to clouds, for their quantity, their number being many; for their quality being exhaled out of the earth and sea, mount up to heaven, cause darkness, and intercept light; sin rises out of the earthly minds of men, who mind earthly things, and who are like the troubled sea, which cannot rest: and the sins of some, like those of Babylon, reach up to heaven, and call for wrath and vengeance to come down from thence; sin causes the darkness of unregeneracy, and is often the reason of darkness to such who have been made light in the Lord; it intercepts the light of his countenance and of Christ, the Sun of Righteousness: now, as a cloud is dispersed and dissipated by the breaking forth of the sun, which, overcoming the cloud, scatters it, so as it is seen no more: in like manner, through the rising of the Sun of Righteousness, with healing in his wings.

5. By a non-remembrance of it: "And their iniquities will I remember no more!" Heb. viii. 12; Isa. xliii. 25. God forgives and forgets; having once forgiven them, he thinks of them no more.

6. By making sin, or rather sinners, white as snow; so David prays, "Wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow." Psal. li. 7. So the Lord promises, "Thy sins shall be as white as snow." Isa. i. 18. "Her Nazarites are purer than snow." Lam. iv. 7.

III. WHAT SINS ARE PARDONED? SINS BOTH WITH RESPECT TO QUALITY AND QUANTITY.

1. For quality; they are called trespasses. Sin is a walking on forbidden ground, for which a man must suffer, unless forgiven; and transgressions of the law of God; a passing over and going beyond the bounds and limits prescribed it: and iniquities, which are contrary to the rules of justice and equity; and sins, errors, aberrations, strayings from the rule of God's word: when God is said to forgive iniquity, transgression, and sin, it takes in every kind and sort of sin; sins are called abominations; not that they are so to sinners, for they delight in them; but to God, to whom they are so very disagreeable. Sin is defined, a transgression of the law, 1 John iii. 4, a breach, a violation of it; which accuses of it, pronounces guilty for it, and curses and condemns; and is only forgiven by the Lawgiver, who is able to save and destroy. Sins are sometimes represented as debts: because being committed, they oblige to the debt of punishment, which God remits; "Who forgiveth all thine iniquities." Psal. ciii. 3; Isa. xxxiii. 24; Mal. iv. 2.

2. For quantity; all trespasses, sins, and transgressions are forgiven. Col. ii. 13; Psal. ciii. 3. Some are more secret, some more open, some less, others greater, more daring and presumptuous; some sins of commission, other sins of omission; but all are forgiven. See Isa. xliii. 22—25.

IV. THE EFFICIENT CAUSE IS GOD, AND NOT ANY CREATURE, ANGELS NOR MEN.

It is not in the power of men to forgive sin; one man may forgive another an offense, as committed against himself; but not as committed against God: saints ought to forgive one another's offenses that arise among them; as God, for Christ's sake, has forgiven them. Eph. iv. 32; Col. ii. 13.

2. There is nothing a man has, nor can do, by which he can procure the pardon of sin, either for himself, or for others:

1. No man, by his riches, and the multitude of his wealth, can give to God a ransom for himself, or his brother make atonement and satisfaction for sin, and obtain the pardon of it. Riches profit not in the day of wrath: bags of gold and silver will be of no avail.

2. Nor is pardon of sin to be obtained by works of righteousness: could it, it would not be of grace; for grace and works are opposed to each other; men would be saved by works, contrary to the scriptures, since pardon is included in salvation, and that is by grace, and not works.

3. Nor is pardon procured by repentance; they are both gifts of grace; and though given to the same persons, the one is not the cause of the other, at least, repentance is not the cause of remission; for true, evangelical repentance flows from, and in the exercise of it, is influenced by the discovery and application of pardoning grace. See Ezek. xvi. 63; Luke vii. 37, 47. Nor is pardon procured by faith, as the cause of it; faith does not obtain it by any virtue of its own, but receives it as obtained by the blood of Christ. Acts x. 43; xxvi. 18.

4. Nor is it procured by a submission to the ordinance of water baptism; baptism neither takes away original sin, nor actual sin, not as to the guilt thereof, as the case of Simon Magus shows; for though the three thousand are directed to be baptized in the name of Christ, for the remission of sins; and Saul was advised by Ananias to arise, and be baptized, and wash away his sins, Acts ii. 38; xxii. 16, yet the meaning is not, as if remission of sins were to be obtained by baptism; but that by means of this ordinance, they might be led to the sufferings, death, and bloodshed of Christ, represented in it.

3. God only can forgive sin; it is his sole prerogative; it belongs to him, and no other. Mark ii. 7; Isa. xliii. 25; Dan. ix. 9. And this appears from the nature of sin itself; it is committed against God; and none but he against whom it is committed can forgive it. Who is a God like unto him that pardoneth iniquity? Mic. vii. 18. Saints in all ages never made their application to any other. Psal. li. 1; Dan. ix. 19; Matt. vi. 9, 12; Acts viii. 22.

V. THE EFFECTS OF PARDON, THAT IS, WHEN APPLIED; FOR THE EFFECTS OF IT ARE NOT SENSIBLY PERCEIVED, UNLESS APPLIED; which are,

1. Peace of conscience; when sin is charged upon the conscience, and there is no sight and sense of pardon, there is no peace; but no sooner is there a view of interest in justification, by the righteousness of Christ, and pardon by his blood, but there is peace. Rom. v. 1.

2. Cheerfulness of spirit: when sin lies as a heavy burden, without a view of pardon, the mind is depressed; it is filled with gloominess, as in the case of Cain: a wounded spirit who can bear? But when the Lord says, "Son or daughter be of good cheer, thy sins are forgiven thee!" cheerfulness takes place; the spirits are raised; the head is lifted up. Psal. li. 8.

3. Comfort of soul: whilst a gracious soul, under a sense of sin, apprehends that God is angry with him, he has no comfort; but when he manifests his pardoning grace, then he concludes his anger is turned away, and he is comforted: "Speak ye comfortably to Jerusalem." Isa. xl. 1, 2.

4. Access to God with boldness and confidence; a soul, under the weight and pressure of the guilt of sin, moves heavily to the throne of grace; and when he comes there, cannot lift up his eyes; but, looking downward, and smiting on his breast, says, God be merciful to me a sinner; but when it has a view of the blood, righteousness, and sacrifice of Christ, it comes with liberty, boldness, and confidence. Rom. v. 1, 2.

5. Attendance on divine worship with pleasure and delight: this flows from a sense of forgiveness of sin, and is one end of it; "There is forgiveness with thee, that thou mayest be feared." Psal. cxxx. 5; Heb. xii. 28.

6. Love to God and Christ is raised, promoted, and increased, by an application of pardon. Luke vii. 47.

7. Evangelical repentance, and the exercise of it, are much influenced by pardon of sin being applied. Ezek. xvi. 63.

8. Thankfulness of soul for such a mercy ; than which there cannot be a greater : if a man be truly impressed with the sense of it, he will call upon his soul, and all within him, to bless and praise the Lord for all his benefits ; and particularly for this, who forgiveth all thy iniquities ! Psal. ciii. 2, 3.

ON CONVERSION.

Acts iii. 19.—And be converted. (H.)

CONVERSION, though it may seem, in some respects, to fall in with regeneration, yet may be distinguished from it. Regeneration is the sole act of God ; conversion consists both of God's act upon men, in turning them, and of acts done by men, under the influence of converting grace ; they turn, being turned. Regeneration is the motion of God towards and upon the heart of a sinner ; conversion is the motion of a sinner towards God, as one expresses it. In regeneration men are wholly passive, as they are also in the first moment of conversion ; but by it become active ; it is therefore sometimes expressed passively : Ye are returned or converted, 1 Pet. ii. 25 ; and sometimes actively ; A great number believed, and turned to the Lord, Acts xi. 21, and when it, the body of the people of the Jews, shall turn to the Lord, which has respect to their conversion in the latter day. 2 Cor. iii. 16.

I. WHAT CONVERSION IS AND WHEREIN IT LIES : The conversion to be treated of is not,

1. An external one, or what lies only in an outward reformation of life and manners, such as that of the Ninevites, for this may be where internal conversion is not, as in the Scribes and Pharisees.

2. Nor is it a mere doctrinal one, nor a conversion from false notions before imbibed to a set of doctrines and truths which are according to the scriptures ; so men of old were converted from Judaism and heathenism to christianity : but all that were so converted to a doctrinal sense were not true and real converts ; some had "the form of godliness without the power, a name to live," &c.

3. Nor the restoration of the people of God from backsliding, when they are in a very affecting and importunate manner called upon to return to the Lord ; Jer. iii. 12, 14, 22 ; Hos. xiv. 1—4 ; so Peter when he fell through temptation, and denied his Lord, and was recovered from it by a look from Christ, it is called his conversion, Luke xxii. 32. But,

4. The conversion under consideration, is a true, real, internal work of God upon the souls of men.

1. In the turn of the heart to God, of the thoughts of the heart ; which are only evil, and that continually, and about evil things, not about God, and the things of God : God is not in all their thoughts, nor in any of the thoughts of wicked men ; but when converted, their thoughts are about their state and condition by nature, about their souls, and their eternal welfare ; it is a turn of the desires of the heart which before were after vain, sinful lusts and pleasures ; but now after God and communion with him, after Christ

and salvation : of the affections of the heart, which before were inordinate, and ran in a wrong channel, towards God, their hearts being circumcised to love him ; and whom they love with their whole hearts and souls, because he first loved them. Conversion is a turn of the mind from carnal things to spiritual ones, and from earthly things to heavenly ones ; yea, it is a turn of the will, which before conversion is in a very bad state, is stubborn and inflexible, biassed to and bent upon that which is evil, and averse to all that is good ; but in conversion God works in men both to will and to do of his good pleasure.

2. Conversion lies in a man's being turned from darkness to light ; the apostle was sent to turn them from darkness to light, Acts xxvi. 18, that is, to be the instrument or means of their conversion, by preaching the gospel.

3. From the power of Satan unto God, as in the above place. Acts xxvi. 18. Satan has great power over men in an unconverted state, his seat is in their hearts, which are the palaces in which he rules ; he works effectually with great power and energy in the children of disobedience ; but now in conversion they are turned from his power, he is dispossessed of them, and his armour taken from him in which he trusted ; the prey is taken out of the hands of the mighty.

4. Conversion lies in turning men from idols, to serve the living God ; not merely from idols of silver and gold, of wood and stone, as formerly, but from the idols of a man's own heart, his lusts and corruptions ; with respect to which the language of a converted sinner is, what have I to do any more with idols ? this is a blessing bestowed in conversion. Unto you first, God having raised up his Son Jesus, sent him to bless you, in turning away every one of you from his iniquities.

5. Conversion lies in turning men from their own righteousness to the righteousness of Christ ; not from doing works of righteousness, for such converted persons are most fit for, and most capable of, and are under the greatest obligations to perform : but from depending upon them for justification before God, and acceptance with him.

6. Conversion lies in a man's turning to the Lord actively under the influence of divine grace : and by this phrase it is often expressed in scripture, as in Isa. x. 21 ; Acts xi. 21 ; 2 Cor. iii. 16 ; men being thoroughly convinced that there is salvation in no other but in Christ, that it is in vain to expect it elsewhere ; they turn to Christ as their Lord and lawgiver, and submit to his commands, renouncing all other lords, and their dominion over them ; and though in their natural state they are like sheep going astray, in conversion they are returned to Christ, as the great shepherd and bishop of souls.

II. THE CAUSES OF CONVERSION.

1. The efficient cause, which is not man, but God.

1. Not by the power of man ; what is said of the conversion, or turning of the Jews from their captivity, is true of the conversion of a sinner, that it is not by might, nor by power, that is, not of man, but by my Spirit, saith the Lord of Hosts. Zech. iv. 6. Men are dead in a moral sense whilst unconverted ; they are dead in trespasses and sins, which are the cause of their death ; and their very living in them is no other than a moral death : nor can they quicken themselves, and unless they are quickened, they cannot be converted. Conversion is such an alteration in a man as is not in his power to effect ; it is like that of an Ethiopian changing his skin, and a leopard his spots. Such things are never heard of, as a blackmoor becoming white, and a leopard becoming clear of his spots ; and as unlikely is it, that a man should

convert himself. Jer. xiii. 23. A tree must first be made good, so as to bring forth good fruit.

2. Nor is conversion owing to the will of men; the will of man, before conversion is in a bad state; it chooses its own ways, and delights in its abominations, it is in high pursuit after the desires of the flesh and of the mind. Conversion is denied to be of the will of men; as the whole of salvation is not of him that willeth, so this part of it in particular; regeneration, with which conversion, in the first moment of it, agrees, is not the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God. Rom. ix. 16; John i. 13.

3. God only is the author and efficient cause of conversion. He that made man's heart, and formed the spirit of man within him, he only can turn their hearts, and frame and mould their spirits, as he pleases; the heart of a king, and so of every other man, is in the hand of the Lord; he makes his people willing in the day of his power, to do what they had before no will nor inclination to do, and yet they act most freely; the man-slayer did not more willingly flee to a city of refuge to shelter him from the avenger of blood, than a sinner, sensible of his danger, flees to Christ for refuge, and lays hold on the hope set before him.

2. The moving or impulsive cause of conversion, is the love, grace, mercy, favor, and good will of God; and not the merits of men; for what is there in men before conversion, to move God to take such a step in their favor; see 1 Cor. vi. 9—11; Eph. ii. 2—4.

3. The instrumental cause, or means of conversion, is usually the ministry of the word; sometimes, indeed, it is wrought without the word, by some remarkable, awakening providence or another, and sometimes by reading the scriptures; but, for the most part, it is through the preaching of the word; hence, ministers are said to turn many to righteousness: and the apostle Paul says, he was sent by Christ unto the Gentile world, to turn men from darkness to light; and this is done both by the preaching of the law and the gospel. The law of the Lord is perfect, converting the soul, Ps. xix. 7, the preaching of the law is made use of by the Spirit of God, to convince of sin, for by the law is the knowledge of sin; though some take this to be rather preparatory to conversion, than conversion itself, which may be ascribed to the gospel. Received ye the Spirit by the works of the law? that is, by preaching the doctrine of obedience to it; or, by the hearing of faith? that is, by the doctrine of the gospel, preaching faith in Christ; which is therefore called the word of faith, and by which it comes; for faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God; Gal. iii. 2; Rom. x. 8—17; but then, the preaching of the word of the gospel is not sufficient of itself to produce the work of conversion in the heart: men may hear it, and not be converted by it; for who is Paul, or who is Apollos, but ministers, or instruments, by whom ye believed? 1 Cor. iii. 5.

III. THE SUBJECTS OF CONVERSION.

Lost sinners redeemed by Christ are the subjects—I will hiss for them, by the ministry of the word, and gather them, which is another phrase for conversion, because I have redeemed them. Zech. x. 8. Sinners shall be converted unto thee; Ps. li. 13; sinners by nature and by practice, and some of them the worst and chief of sinners; and therefore the wonderful grace of God is the more displayed in their conversion. 1 Cor. vi. 11; 1 Tim. i. 3, 14, 15.

REGENERATION CONSIDERED IN ITS CAUSES AND BENEFITS.

1 Pet. i. 3—5.—Blessed be the God, and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, which according to his abundant mercy, hath begotten us again unto a lively hope, by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. To an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for you, who are kept by the power of God, through faith, unto salvation, ready to be revealed in the last time. (S. S.)

THE ungodly may be patient, but are seldom joyful, in affliction—
 Their happiness almost entirely depends on outward circumstances—
 But the regenerate have sources of joy peculiar to themselves—
 Nor can they be in any state wherein they have not abundant cause to bless God—

The persons to whom St. Peter wrote, were scattered abroad, and in a state of persecution—

Yet he begins his epistle to them, not in terms of pity and condolence, but of praise and thanksgiving.

I. THE CAUSES OF REGENERATION.

Regeneration is a spiritual and supernatural change of heart—

But the text requires us to consider it not so much in its nature, as in its causes—

The *efficient* cause of it is God.

God under the Old Testament dispensation, was the God of Abraham—

Under the gospel, he appears under the more endearing title, “the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ”—

He is our God and Father also in and through Christ Jesus—

In this relation he is considered as begetting us again—

And he certainly is the Father of our spirits, both in their first formation, and in their subsequent renovation, Compare Heb. xii. 9, with Eph. ii. 10.

The *final* cause or end is our present and eternal happiness.

God begets his people to “a lively hope” *here*—

Their hope is widely different from the cold and carnal hope of the unregenerate—

He has prepared for them also an “inheritance” *hereafter*—

And this inheritance is unspeakably glorious—

Not corruptible, as earthly “treasures, which moth and rust will corrupt”—

Not defiled, like the earthly Canaan, by wicked inhabitants—

Not fading, by use, age, or enjoyment, like the pleasures of sense—

The *instrumental* cause is the Lord Jesus Christ,

Christ is the medium of every blessing, whether of grace or glory—

Our blessings are generally represented as imparted through his death—

But here, as in many other places, they are ascribed to his resurrection—

His resurrection assured to us the acceptance of his sacrifice—

It is also a pledge and earnest of the resurrection of all his members—

Besides, it enables him both to intercede for us, and to send the Spirit to us—

His Word and Spirit are, indeed, the more immediate instruments which God uses—

Yet more remotely may the Resurrection of Christ be considered as the *instrumental* cause of our regeneration—

The *moving* cause of it is his mercy.

God has not respect to any goodness or merit in the creature—

He is actuated only by his own grace and “mercy”—

Of this the conversion of a soul is a marvelous display—

If the state of a converted person be compared with that of one unconverted, or of one that has perished, he will appear to have experienced “abundant mercy”—

They who have experienced this change are sure to possess at last the benefits connected with it.

II. THE SECURITY OF THE REGENERATE.

Some even of the regenerate are ready to doubt whether God will bestow on them the inheritance they hope for—

Others fear they shall fall short of it through their own frailty—

But God has secured to them the full and everlasting enjoyment of it—

The inheritance is “reserved for them.”

Earthly inheritances may be taken away by fraud and violence—

Not even crowns or kingdoms can boast of any stability—

But the saints inheritance is in heaven—

There it is out of the reach of all enemies—

God himself keeps it for his people, as their unalienable right—

They also are kept for it.

They are weak and helpless in themselves—

They are surrounded also with hosts of enemies—

But they commit themselves to God “by faith”—

In so doing they interest the power of God on their behalf—

God keeps them according to his promise, Isa. xxvi. 3; Jer. xxxii. 40.

God keeps them as in an impregnable garrison*—

God keeps them unto their full and final salvation—

INFER,

1. How happy are God's people here !

The change they have experienced in regeneration is truly blessed—

The prospects they enjoy are bright and glorious—

Their security enhances these blessings—

What then need they regard in this world?—

Surely they should rejoice, though in the midst of tribulations—

Let every one then, when encompassed with troubles of whatever kind say, “Blessed be God, who hath begotten me again”—

2. How happy will God's people soon be !

Their inheritance, though at a distance, is a consolation to them—

The very hope of it fills them with joy unspeakable—

It will do this, even under the heaviest afflictions—

What sensations then will the full enjoyment of this inheritance excite!—

What joy will that be when it is without any alloy of sin or sorrow!—

But let us remember, that “we must be born again” in order to have any title to this inheritance, John iii. 3.

If we continue unregenerate, we shall inherit a far different portion—

But if we have really experienced the new birth, we are heirs of glory—

And the salvation reserved for us is “ready to be revealed”—

Let us then labor to secure this glorious inheritance—

And look for it with holy ardour and eager expectation—

This seems to be the import of the word *ἀποδομις*

CONVERSION A GROUND OF THANKFULNESS.

Rom. vi. 17. God be thanked, that ye were the servants of sin; but ye have obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine which was delivered you. (S. S.)

EXEMPTION from the punishment of sin is doubtless an inestimable blessing—

But deliverance from its power is equally precious—

The most advanced christians greatly delight in this part of salvation—

Hence St. Paul thanks God for bestowing this mercy on the church at Rome—

We shall consider from the text,

I. THE CHARACTER OF ALL WHILE IN AN UNCONVERTED STATE.

All are "servants of sin" till they receive converting grace.

All indeed are not slaves to the same sin—

Some are led captive by their lusts and passions—

Others are drawn away by the pleasures and vanities of the world—

Others are under the dominion of pride and self-righteousness—

But all without exception are alienated from the life of God, Eph. iv. 18.

All are full of unbelief and self-sufficiency—

This, however humiliating, is an indisputable truth.

The scriptures every where assert this respecting fallen man, John viii.

34; Rom vi. 16, with the text.

The most eminent saints confess it to have been their own case, Tit. iii. 3

Experience proves it with respect to ourselves—

The very excuse which men offer in extenuation of their sins, viz. "that they cannot live as God requires," establishes this truth—

But it does not remain so in regenerate persons; as appears from

II. THE CHANGE THEY EXPERIENCE IN CONVERSION.

God instructs them in "the form of sound doctrine."

They hear the declarations of God in his word—

They are enlightened by the Spirit to understand them—

They have the word applied with divine efficacy to their souls—

This form of doctrine they "obey from the heart."

They yet indeed feel a law of sin in their members—

But "they no more serve sin" willingly as before—

On the contrary, "they now delight in the law of God"—

They obey it, not in appearance only or by constraint, but willingly and without reserve—

They are now cast, as it were, into the mould of the gospel.

This is the force of the original; and is the marginal version—

This is also the case, wherever the gospel takes effect, Col. i. 6.

The wax has every lineament of the seal, and the coin of the die—

So do they resemble God, who are renewed by the gospel, 2 Cor. iii. 18.

The blessedness of this change will appear if we consider,

III. HOW GREAT A CAUSE OF THANKFULNESS SUCH A CONVERSION IS.

The apostle thanks God that they were no longer slaves of sin.

Sin is at all times a ground of shame and sorrow, Rom. vi. 21.

Paul esteemed it so in his own particular case, 1 Tim. i. 13.

Every saint of God views it in the same light—

St. Paul therefore did not mean that their subjection to it was a ground of thankfulness—

But the subject of his thanksgiving is, that the Romans, who once were slaves of sin, were now entirely devoted to God—

This is a ground of unspeakable thankfulness on many accounts.

1. On account of *the moral change* in the persons themselves.

What can be more deplorable than to be a slave of sin!—

What can be more amiable than to have all our actions and affections corresponding with the the word of God?—

Surely this is a ground of thankfulness—

2. On account of *the effects* of this change *on society*.

How much better member of society must a child of God be than a slave of sin!—

How much happier would the world be, if such a change were general!—

On this account therefore it became the apostle to be thankful—

3. On account of *the eternal consequences* that must follow this change.

They who die slaves of sin must suffer its punishment—

They are now the children of the devil, and must soon be his companions in misery, John viii. 44.

But the regenerate are children and heirs of God—

Surely eternity will scarcely suffice to thank God for this—

We shall conclude with a suitable ADDRESS,

1. To the unregenerate.

All who have not been freed from sin are of this number—

Alas! the friends of such have little cause to thank God for them—

They have rather reason to weep and mourn, Jer. xiii. 17.

They may indeed bless God that the stroke of vengeance has been delayed—

O that all such persons might know the day of their visitation!—

Let all cry to God for his converting grace—

Nor let any rest in an external or partial change—

Nothing but a cordial compliance with the gospel, and a real conformity to it, will avail us in the day of judgment—

2. To the regenerate.

The foregoing marks have sufficiently characterized these persons—

Such persons will do well to reflect on the mercy they have received—

The recollection of their past guilt will serve to keep them *humble*—

A consciousness of their remaining infirmities will make them *watchful*—

A view of the change wrought in them will make them *thankful*—

Let the regenerate then adopt the words of the Psalmist, Ps. ciii. 1—3.

Let them beware of ever returning to their former ways, 2 Pet. ii. 20, 21.

Let them press forward for higher degrees of holiness and glory, Phil. iii 13, 14.

3. To those who doubt to which class they belong.

Many, from what has been wrought in them, have reason to hope—

Yet, from what still remains to be done, they find reason to fear—

Hence they are long in painful suspense—

But let such remember, that sin, if truly lamented and resisted, does not prove them unregenerate, Jam. iii. 2.

On the contrary, their hatred of it, and opposition to it, are hopeful signs that they are in part renewed—

Nevertheless, let them endeavor to put this matter beyond a doubt, 2 Pet. i. 10.

Let them look to Christ as their almighty deliverer, John viii. 36.

Let them pray for, and depend upon, his promised aid, 2 Cor. xii. 9.

THE IMPORTANCE OF SANCTIFICATION.

Col iii. 11.—Christ is all, and in all.* (H. H.)

IN order to ascertain the true sense of any passage of scripture, two things are to be attended to: we should mark the scope of the context, and compare the terms or phrases with similar passages of Holy Writ. By separating these canons of interpretation, we shall often overlook the true meaning of God's word, and put upon it a forced construction; whereas, if we unite them, we shall almost always find its just import.

It is undeniable that the verses which precede and follow our text refer to sanctification; see ver. 1—14; nor is there any thing which properly relates to our justification: and therefore we have a strong presumptive ground for interpreting the words of our text in reference to the new nature, which is spoken of in the verse immediately before it: nor could any thing but the peculiarity of the expression lead one for a moment to look for any other sense. But it seems that to interpret the word "Christ," as meaning the image of Christ, or the New Man, is to take a great, and almost an unwarrantable, liberty with scripture. Nevertheless, if we compare some other passages with the text,† we shall find that we are fully authorized to put this construction upon it, and that there is no necessity to understand it in any other way than that which the context so evidently requires.

The meaning then of the words before us is simply this. We should be daily putting off our old and corrupt nature, and be putting on a new and holy nature; because nothing else will be at all regarded by God: whatever advantages we possess, we have nothing, if we be not holy: on the other hand, whatever disadvantages we labor under, we shall suffer no loss, if we be holy: for the image of "Christ" on the soul "is all, in all" persons, and under all circumstances: where that is, God will be pleased; and where that is not, he will be eternally displeased.

In order to confirm this momentous truth, we shall shew, that, in the eyes of God, *our restoration to the divine image "is all in all."* It is,

I. THE ONE SCOPE OF ALL HIS PLANS—

What did he design in the redemption of the world at large?

When first he determined to rescue man from perdition, he decreed that he would "create us anew in Christ Jesus *unto good works*, in which he ordained that we should walk." Eph. ii. 10.

The means which he used for the accomplishment of our salvation had especial respect to this end, not to save us *in* our sins, but *from* them. Matt. i. 21; Acts iii. 26.

*The author has formerly treated this text as Commentators in general have done, in reference to our justification before God. But he apprehends on further consideration, that it refers rather to our sanctification. In either sense, the position is true, that "Christ is all;" but the latter interpretation seems more exactly to convey the mind of the Spirit in this passage. The reader, by comparing the two statements, will be enabled to judge for himself.

† See 2 Cor. xiii. 5, where "Christ in us" must be understood of his image, because it is that whereby we are to ascertain whether we be in the faith. See also Gal. iv. 19, where "Christ formed in us" cannot be understood of Christ *personally*, but of Christ *spiritually*, i. e. of his image. Above all, see Rom. xiii. 14, where the very metaphor which occurs in our context, is used. "Put on the new man," says our context, "for Christ," i. e. the putting on of Christ, or of the new man, "is all." And, in the passage referred to, is the very expression, "Put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ."

He sent his only dear Son to take our nature, and in that nature to live, to die, to rise again. But in all this he aimed, not at our happiness merely, but our restoration to the image which we had lost. Gal. i. 4; 1 Pet. i. 18, 19, and ii. 24; Tit. ii. 14. This is specified in terms peculiarly strong and energetic, in order that we may not overlook this truth as if it were only of secondary importance. Eph. v. 25—27.

He gave his Holy Spirit also for the same end: he gave him to humble us, John xvi. 8—11, to renew us, Tit. iii. 5, 6, to mortify all our vile lusts and passions, Rom. viii. 13, to fashion us after the divine image,* and to perfect that image in our souls. 2 Cor. iii. 18.

What does he design in imparting that redemption to individuals?

Wherefore did he choose any of us from before the foundation of the world? It was "that we might be holy, and without blame before him in love." Eph. i. 4. Why has he revealed his grace in our hearts? It was to "teach us, that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live righteously, soberly, and godly in this present world." Tit. ii. 11, 12. If he apply his promises to our souls, or hide his face from us, it is alike for our profit, that we may be partakers of his holiness." 2 Cor. vii. 1, with Heb. xii. 10. Whatever be his dispensations towards us, "this is his will, even our sanctification;" 1 Thess. iv. 3; and this is his ultimate design in all, even to "carry on the good work he has begun," Phil. i. 6, to "sanctify us wholly," 1 Thess. v. 23, and to "perfect that which concerneth us." Psa. cxxxviii. 8.

But holiness is also,

II. THE ONE OBJECT OF HIS REGARD—

Nothing but that is regarded by him in this world—

The external ordinances of religion are not only worthless, but even hateful, in his sight, if destitute of solid piety. Isa. i. 11—16. On the other hand, the smallest particle of genuine goodness is not overlooked by him. 1 Kings xiv. 13. Even the semblance of it has sometimes been rewarded by him, in order that he might shew to mankind how great a value he has for it, where it really exists. 1 Kings xxi. 29. One single disposition is declared by him to be of great price in his sight. 1 Pet. iii. 4. The purposes which have never been realized in act, are highly commended by him. 1 Kings viii. 18. And wherever he sees a person laboring to do his will, he invariably reveals to him his love in a more abundant measure, John xiv. 23, and communicates to him his richest blessings. Isa. lviii. 10, 11.

Nothing but that will be regarded by him in the world to come—

When we shall stand at the judgment-seat of Christ, the inquiry will be, not, what we have professed, but what we have done: Matt. vii. 21—23, and xxv. 31—46; and a Gentile who has served God according to the light that he enjoyed, will be preferred before the christian, who has not made a suitable improvement of his superior advantages. Rom. ii. 25—27. Apparently trivial occurrences will be noticed in that day; and rewards will be dispensed, not according to the greatness and splendor of our actions, but according to their intrinsic qualities, and to the principle evinced by them. Matt. x. 42. We must not indeed imagine that there is any *merit* in our poor services, for there is imperfection in them all; and, "if we had done all that is commanded us, we should be only unprofitable servants:" but God delights in holiness; and wherever he beholds it, he will, of his own

*Eph. iv. 23, 24, with 2 Cor. i. 22. A "seal" is an impress of the divine image; and an "earnest" is the commencement of heavenly purity and joy.

grace and mercy, bestow upon it a proportionate reward, exalting those to the highest thrones in glory, who have made the greatest improvement of the talents committed to them. Matt. xxv. 19—23.

There will be no distinction made, except what is grounded on the different degrees of conformity to the divine image which the different individuals have attained. God will not respect the circumcised more than the uncircumcised, or the rich and learned more than the poor and illiterate. In all persons equally the image of Christ will be sought for; and the possession, or want of it, will determine their eternal state: "Christ will then be, as he now is, all, and in all.

We conclude with INQUIRING, *Who amongst you is like-minded with God?*

1. Ye children of this world—

How far are ye from according with God! With him, *Christ* is all; with you, *the world*. If ye may but enjoy the pleasures, the honors, the riches of the world, ye care not about the image of Christ: to be rich in faith and good works is not the object of your ambition: *that* you leave to the old, the sick, the enthusiasts. But ah! if Christ be *all*, as indeed he is, think what a vanity ye are pursuing: think how poor ye will be in the day of judgment; and how you will then execrate your present ways. Be persuaded to be wise in time: and beg without delay that "Christ may be made unto you wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption." 1 Cor. i. 30.

2. Ye self-deceiving professors—

How many are there in the church, who will talk about Christ, and speak of him as the ground of all their hopes, while yet they are shamefully destitute of his image! Yes, grievous it is to say, that there are "many vain-talkers and deceivers" now, as well as in the apostolic age; many that are proud and passionate; many that are earthly-minded and covetous; many that are unchaste and lewd; many that are deceitful in their words, and dishonest in their dealings; many in short, whose tempers, and dispositions, and conduct, are a disgrace to their profession. Know ye, if such there be here present, that ye are as unlike to God as Satan himself is; and that all your knowledge, all your experiences, and all your professions, will only aggravate your condemnation, if you die in your present state. Job xxxvi. 13. You do well to rely on Christ, and to make him *your all* in point of dependence; but know for a certainty, that, however you may pretend to trust in him, you never can be saved by him, unless you become new creatures: 2 Cor. 5, 17; for "without holiness no man shall see the Lord." Heb. xii. 14.

3. Ye true believers—

You can appeal to God that you are like-minded with him in this grand point; and that you desire as much to be saved from sin, as to be delivered from hell itself. This is a blessed evidence that ye are born of God. 1 John iii. 10. While ye are thus panting after holiness, ye have nothing to fear; your faith is sound, James ii. 22, your hope is scriptural, 1 John iii. 3, and saving. Rom. v. 5, and viii. 24. Go on then from grace to grace, from strength to strength. 2 Pet. iii. 18. Be daily putting off the old man with its lusts, ver. 8, 9, and putting on the new man with all its characteristic graces. Ver. 12, 13. Be "growing up thus into Christ in all things as your living Head," Eph. iv. 15, till you have arrived at "the full measure of the stature of Christ:" ib. ver. 13; and when you have attained a perfect meetness for the enjoyment of your God, you shall be like him, and with him for ever. 1 John iii. 2.

THE EXCELLENCY AND EFFICACY OF THE GOSPEL.

2 Cor. iii. 18. But we all with open face beholding, as in a glass, the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image, from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord. (S. S.)

The Jews, when compared with the heathen world, were highly privileged—

But the dispensation under which they lived was in every respect inferior to that of the gospel—

The apostle, in vindicating his own character, incidentally mentions the blessings which the Corinthians had experienced by means of his ministry—

Hence he takes occasion to set forth the superior excellency of the gospel above the law—

In confirmation of this point we will consider,

I. THE EXCELLENCY OF THE GOSPEL.

In the context the law is spoken of as a ministration of condemnation—

Whereas the gospel is a ministration of the Spirit and of righteousness—

It is a revelation of the “glory of the Lord.”

The law was in some degree a manifestation of the divine glory—

It displayed, however, chiefly the majesty and holiness of the Deity—

But the gospel displays the love and mercy of God—

It exhibits all the perfections of God harmonizing and glorified in the work of redemption—

Thus it is a revelation of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ, 2 Cor. iv. 6.

It manifests this glory to the soul.

Moses veiled the divine lustre which shined in his face—

This was an intimation to the Jews that they could not comprehend the full scope of the law which he published, ver. 13.

But this veil is taken away by Christ, ver. 14.

The gospel reflects Christ's glory as a mirror reflects the sun—

We behold that glory “with open, i. e. unveiled face”—

This is the common privilege of “all” who believe—

Nor is it more excellent in its discoveries than in its effects.

II. THE EFFICACY OF IT.

The apostle ascribes a wonderful efficacy to the gospel—

Experience attests the truth of his declarations—

It transforms the soul into the divine image.

A view of Jehovah's glory caused the face of Moses to shine—

So a view of Christ's glory in the gospel changes our hearts—

It renews us after the very image of our Lord and Savior—

It does this, notwithstanding we may have been hitherto most abandoned—

Every fresh discovery which it makes to us of Christ's glory increases that effect.

The first exercise of faith in Christ makes a great change—

But subsequent views of his glory advance the work of sanctification—

In this way is our progress in holiness carried on to perfection—

This power, however, it derives wholly from “the Spirit of the Lord.”

The gospel has not that power in itself—

Were its power inherent, it would operate uniformly on all—

But its operation is dependent on the will of God, 1 Cor. xii. 11.

The word is called “the sword of the Spirit”—

It is the Spirit's instrument whereby he subdues souls to the obedience of faith—

Every fresh effect produced by it arises from the concurring operation of the Spirit—

Yet, as it is the great instrument whereby the Spirit works, the effects are properly ascribed to—

INFER,

1. How great a blessing it is to have the gospel preached to us
Nothing else will produce the effects here ascribed to the gospel—

The terrors of the law may alarm, but will not sanctify the heart—

But the mild accents of the gospel win the soul—

A manifestation of Christ's glory constrains us to obedience—

Let all rejoice therefore in hearing the glad tidings—

Let all endeavor to experience these glorious effects—

2. Whence it is that many make so small a proficiency in holiness.

Many truly desire to advance in holiness—

But they seek it in dependence on their own strength—

Hence they make a small proficiency in the divine life—

They should rather use the means prescribed in the text—

They should be often occupied in surveying the glory of Christ—

The discoveries of his glory would do more than all their legal exertions—

Let every eye therefore be fixed on him, till the effects appear both in our hearts and lives—

Our views of him ere long shall be incomparably brighter, 1 Cor. xiii. 12.

Then the effects also shall be proportionably increased, 1 John iii. 2.

THE GOSPEL FREES MEN FROM SIN AND DEATH.

Rom. viii. 2.—The law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus hath made me free from the law of sin and death. (S. S.)

THE world in general account it liberty to live loose to their passions—

But such freedom is indeed the sorest bondage to sin and Satan, Rom. vi. 16.

None possess true liberty but those who are freed by Christ, John viii. 36.

The state of the demoniacs when healed by Christ resembled theirs, Luke viii. 35.

Paul was made a glorious example of it to all ages—

He was once under condemnation, both because he adhered to the covenant of works, and was governed by his own impetuous will—

He now rejoiced in a freedom from the sin that he had indulged, and from the curse to which he had subjected himself—"The law of," &c.

We shall first *explain*, and then *improve* the text.

I. EXPLAIN IT.

It is not needful to state the various interpretations given of the text—

We shall adopt that which seems most easy, and agreeable to the context—

We will begin with *explaining the terms*.

"The law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus" is the gospel covenant as confirmed to us in Christ, and revealed to us by the Spirit.

The "Spirit of life" is the Holy Ghost, who is the author and preserver of spiritual life, John iii. 5. Eph. iii. 16.

The "law" of the Spirit is the gospel as revealed and applied by him—It is called a law because it has all the essential properties of a law*—

It is often spoken of as a law both by prophets and apostles, Isaiah ii. 3 Rom. iii. 27.

It is said to be the law of the Spirit "in Christ Jesus," because the blessings of the gospel are treasured up in Christ, confirmed to us through Christ, and received by us from Christ, Col. i. 19; 2 Cor. i. 20; John i. 16.

"The law of sin and death" may be understood either of the covenant of works or of our indwelling corruption.

The covenant of works is a "law" to which all are by nature subject—

It is called the "law of sin and death," because both sin and death come by that law†

Our indwelling corruption also operates as "a law" within us, Rom. vii 23.

It invariably hurries us on to "sin and death," Rom. vii. 5.

We shall next *explain the proposition contained in the terms.*

The proposition is, that "the gospel frees us from the curse of the law, and from the dominion of sin."

When we embrace the gospel we cease to be under the covenant of works, Rom. vi. 14, latter part.

We then partake of all the blessings which Christ has purchased for us—

We are liberated from the condemnation due to sin, Rom. viii. 1.

We are freed, through the aid of the Spirit, from the power of sin, Rom. viii. 13; and vi. 14, former part.

This proposition is to be understood as extending to all believers.

It is not true with respect to the apostles only—

It was exemplified in all the first converts‡—

And is experienced still by every sincere christian—

The text thus explained is capable of most useful improvement.

II. IMPROVE IT.

It is replete with very important *instruction.*

It shews us the wretched state of every unregenerate man.

We are all in bondage to "the law of sin and death"—

We are justly subjected to the curses of the broken law, Gal. iii. 10.

We are also led captive by our own corrupt appetites—

Even St. Paul himself was in this very state, Rom. vii. 9.

Let us then humble ourselves under a conviction of this truth—

It declares to us the only method of deliverance from that state.

It was the gospel which freed the apostle—

The same will avail for every other person—

We must however "obey the gospel," and receive it as our "law of faith"—

* A law is a precept enforced with sanctions; and such is the gospel: it is a precept, 1 John iii. 23; and it is enforced with the most encouraging and awful sanctions, Mark xvi. 16.

† Without that law there had been no transgression, and consequently, no sin (which is the transgression of a law;) nor death (which is the penalty inflicted for transgression)—Compare 1 John iii. 4. Rom. v. 13. 1 Cor. xv. 56. Hence it is called "the ministration of death and condemnation." 2 Cor. iii. 7, 9.

‡ One hour they were full of guilt and wickedness; the next they were rejoicing in the pardon of their sins, and in the practice of all holy duties. Acts ii. 46, 47

We must look for its blessings from Christ through the Spirit—

In this way we may all adopt the language of the text in reference to our own happy existence—

It affords also abundant matter of *reproof*.

It reproves those who despond as though there were no hope for them.

Many think their guilt too great to be pardoned, and their lusts too strong to be subdued—

But Paul's case was intended to prevent such desponding fears, 1 Tim. i. 16.

Let none therefore any more complain like those of old, Ezek. xxxvii. 11.

Every one may find encouragement in the power and mercy of God, Isa. lvi. 1.

It reproves also those who speak against an assurance of faith.

It would indeed be presumptuous in some to profess an assurance of faith—

But God is desirous that all his people should enjoy it, 1 John v. 13.

Let not any one therefore reprobate it as presumption—

Let every one rather seek the assurance expressed in the text—

It may administer *comfort* also to many sincere christians.

Many are yet fighting against their manifold corruptions—

And because they obtain not a perfect deliverance, they tremble under apprehensions of the divine wrath—

But Paul himself bewailed bitterly his indwelling corruption, Rom. vii. 24.

Yet that did not prevent him from rejoicing in the partial freedom he experienced—

Let upright souls take comfort from this reflection.

TRUE BELIEVERS THE CHILDREN OF GOD.

Gal. iii. 26.—For ye are all the children of God, &c. (H.)

In the context the apostle shows the superior excellency of the gospel dispensation to that of the law. Those who were under it, were “shut up,” &c. Ver. 23. It was only as a schoolmaster, &c. Ver. 24. The blessings of heaven are no longer confined to one nation, but extend to all; ver. 28; and especially to all true believers—“For ye are all the children of God,” &c. I shall,

I. CONSIDER THE SONSHIP OF BELIEVERS UNDER THE GOSPEL.

I need scarcely observe, that believers are not the sons of God in the same sense as our blessed Lord, whose generation is ineffable; being one in nature, perfections, and glory with the Father.—But,

1. In common with the other intelligent creatures of God. In this respect, they have all one Father. In a peculiar manner, he is the Father of Spirits. In the intellectual powers, moral endowments, and immortality of the soul, they resemble him, for these are his image. Hence angels are called his sons, and Adam, the son of God; nay, the whole human race is said to be his off-spring. Acts xvii. 29.

2. They are children of God by their external profession, and a peculiar relation to him. In this sense, Israel is called his first-born, and his son, Hos. xi. 1; Matt. ii. 15.

3. **THEIR SONSHIP** consists chiefly in their regeneration and adoption. By the last, there is a change in their state. Formerly they were the slaves of Satan, and rebels; but now the friends of God, as was Abraham. By regeneration there is a change in their principles, disposition, and practice. They are born again, 1 Peter i. 23, and are partakers of the divine nature. The resemblance is real, though greatly inferior to the original. Hence, God is not ashamed to be called their God, nor is Christ ashamed to call them brethren. Which leads me to observe,

4. That this sonship is not a mere title or mark of distinction, but has privileges the most excellent annexed to it: there is no condemnation to them: they are his temples; led by his Spirit; abide in their Father's house; yea, in his heart and love; but particularly,

They have a title to incorruption and immortality, or a blessed resurrection. The body must die, but it is redeemed as well as the soul; was his habitation, while here, through the Spirit, and an instrument in his service; and he will raise it again. Rom. viii. 23.

They are born to a great inheritance. Though children of wrath by nature, yet, in virtue of adoption, they are heirs of salvation with eternal glory. They are heirs of God himself, Rom. viii. 17, and have indeed a goodly heritage. Psal. xvi. 5.

5. This sonship is equally the privilege of every believer in Christ. "Ye are all the children of God," says the apostle. They may be distinguished from each other, as to external circumstances in life, spiritual gifts and graces, but their filial relation is the same.

6. It is a privilege of which they are conscious, and hence they enjoy the comfort of it: with holy confidence, they cry, Abba, Father; Gal. iv. 6; and delight in approaching to him, with a childlike holy boldness in prayer.

II. HOW IT IS THAT THEY ATTAIN TO THIS PRIVILEGE AND DIGNITY.—The text says, by faith in Christ Jesus. To illustrate this, it may be proper to recollect,

1. That in the state of primitive innocence, Adam was truly the son of God: he resembled God. Gen. i. 27. This resemblance was effaced by sin, his former relation to God as his son then ceased, and he was turned out of God's family and garden as a rebel, while he and his numerous progeny became children of disobedience and wrath.

2. It is by faith, or a supernatural revelation only, that we are informed how this high prerogative of sonship may be regained. This surpassed the capacity of the wisest philosopher, and even of angels themselves. It is brought to light by the gospel. Gal. iv. 4, 5.

What a marvellous climax, and cluster of divine prodigies are here! Re-count them with admiration! The mission and incarnation of God's own Son—his abject condition as a servant, under the grievous yoke of the law—himself a ransom for the slaves of sin—these slaves taken into fellowship with himself—to whom he grants this divine filiation!

3. We become the children of God, when we cordially believe in Christ: we are thereby brought into union with Christ, and into a dear relation to God, as his Father and ours. We are then born of God, and have the principle or seed of the life of God in the soul; and, consequently, are his children, and in an adopted state; suitable to that relation. John i. 12. To conclude.

1. From what has been said, let me address the children of God in the words of the beloved apostle. 1 John iii. 1. Be astonished ye heavenly principalities and powers, to see such base-born slaves, and villainous crea-

tures taken into the family of God; rank in dignity with you, and made heirs of the same inheritance. Unmeasurable love!

The immunities and glory of the adopted state are beyond description. It is an adoption procured at an infinite price, and elevates to high honor. "Is it a light thing," said David, "to be the king's son-in-law?" But what is this when compared to that of being the sons and daughters of the Almighty.

2. Forget not the love and duty, submission and service, that results from this relation. If I be a father, says God, where is mine honor?

Should not this filial relation reconcile you to the cross, though heavy? It is the lot assigned by Infinite Wisdom, and sent in great kindness. Heb. xii. 6.

Are you indeed of the same family and Father? What a mighty motive is this to love as brethren, to be pitiful, and courteous, and kindly affected one to another, forbearing and forgiving one another, &c.

While mingled here with the children of this world, be watchful lest you imbibe their spirit, learn their ways and vices, stain your character, and be a scandal to your profession. Remember that you have in you the blood-royal of heaven, and being washed in the blood of Jesus from your sins, return not to wallow in the mire—That ye may be blameless. Phil. ii. 15.

3. How insipid, alas! are subjects of this kind to the generality even of gospel hearers! Show them how to acquire a fortune, &c., and they will be all attention; but publish the riches of God's gracious adoption, they relish it not. Blinded sinner, what a fatal choice dost thou make! What though thou hadst the wisdom of a Solomon, the wealth of a Cræsus, the beauty of an Absalom, and were as high in dignity and power as ever Haman was, if thou art not a child of God, thou shalt at last lie down in sorrow, and be brought out of the grave to the day, the dreadful day of the perdition of ungodly men.

THE INCREASE OF CHRIST'S KINGDOM.

John iii. 30.—He must increase. (H.)

THESE are the words of John the Baptist, in answer to a complaint which his disciples made concerning Christ, who, it appears, was baptising great multitudes; v. 26; afraid, perhaps, that he would eclipse the glory of their Master. John tells them, that he had told them before that he was not the Messiah, but his forerunner; and that now he was come, his joy was fulfilled, v. 29. He, says he, must increase. I shall consider,

I. WHAT THE INCREASE OF CHRIST'S KINGDOM AND GLORY IS WHICH WE ARE TO EXPECT.

It is the increase of his mediatorial kingdom. and the manifestation of his glory in the world. This implies,

1. The spread of gospel light through the world. It is in this way the man of sin is to be destroyed, 2 Thess. ii. 8, and the earth filled with heavenly knowledge. Hab. ii. 14.

2. That many burning and shining lights will be employed for this purpose—men full of holy fire and zeal for God, willing to run all hazards, by sea and land, to spread the glory of Christ, Dan. xii. 4.

3. That the number of Christ's subjects shall be greatly increased; this will be to his honor, Prov. xiv. 28. His arrows will be sharp in the hearts of his enemies, and his converts numerous as the drops of dew. Ps. cx 2, 3.

4. That truth shall triumph over error: that infidelity, Deism, Arianism, Socinianism, and popery, with all its superstition, shall then give way before the blaze of the Sun of Righteousness.

5. The increase of true piety, when the followers of Christ shall be wholly devoted to him—manifesting holy tempers, holy conversation, and a holy life.

6. An increase of zeal and public spirit among Christians. They shall boldly confess Christ before men; use every resource, and exert all their powers, to promote the good of mankind.

II. THE TIMES AND SEASONS OF THIS GLORIOUS INCREASE.

1. The apostolic age was the most remarkable time that was ever known; when every sermon made new conquests and additions to the church, till every city and corner of the vast Roman empire was filled with christians. But,

2. We have promises of a more full and glorious increase of Christ's kingdom in the latter day, or towards the end of the world, Dan. ii. 28—44; vii. 27.

The image represents the four grand monarchies. The Babylonian, is the golden head; the Medo-Persian, the breast and arms of silver; the Macedonian, or Grecian, the belly and thighs of brass; and the Roman, the legs of iron, &c. which was to break and bruise all the rest; Dan. ii. 40; but, in its last stage, was itself to be divided into ten lesser kingdoms, represented by the ten toes; and in another vision, by ten horns. Chap. vii. and Rev. xvii.

Then follows the establishment of the Messiah's kingdom. This is the stone mentioned Dan. ii. 34, which is to become a great mountain, and fill the world, v. 35. A kingdom which will swallow up all others and be established forever. Ver. 44.

These ten toes, horns, or kings, shall oppose the Lamb in his grand designs; but he shall overcome them by the word of his power, and shall range themselves under his banner; shall hate the whore of Babylon, the church of Rome, and make her desolate. Rev. xvii. 12—16.

Then shall the kingdoms of the world become the kingdoms of Christ. Rev. xi. 15.

The great river Euphrates will be dried up, to prepare the way for the kings of the east. Rev. xvi. 12.

The blindness of the Jews will be removed, and the fulness of the Gentiles shall come in. Rom. xi. 1, 25, 26.

Jerusalem shall be rebuilt, and be holy. Isa. lx. 10, 12, 13, 21.

The Jews shall be gathered out of all countries where they are dispersed Ezek. xxxvi. 24, 28.

All nations shall be gathered together to see his glory. Isa. ii. 2.

There shall be no more war between nations. Isa. ii. 4.

When these prophecies are fulfilled, what a glorious increase will it be to the Mediator's kingdom and glory! Then shall be accomplished the overthrow of Babylon and Antichrist, the destruction of the Turkish empire, the bringing in of the Jews, with the fulness of the Gentiles!

Glorious period! and we have ground to expect that we are arrived at the eve of that eventful period. Hence the establishment of Bible and Mission-

ary So ieties, and the nvely interest which rich and poor, and even crowned heads, are taking in the spread of the gospel to the ends of the earth. indeed, such a public spirit for doing good was never before, to the same extent, witnessed in the Christian world. This appears to be the dawn of a glorious day.

But previous to this glorious event, there will be

1. A very general defection in the churches of Christ; 2 Pet. ii. 1; which, in many instances, is awfully the case already.

2. There will be great numbers of infidels, and profane scoffers, deriding serious godliness, and contemning the promises. 2 Pet. iii. 3, 4.

3. Great troubles in the world, and great fear and distress in the church. Dan. xii. 1; also Matt. xxiv., and Luke xxi.

4. Great security among the enemies of Christ, and the Romish harlot is lifted up with pride. Rev. xvii. 7, 8.

5. A marvellous revolution in one of the ten horns, Rev. xi. 13; or one of the ten kingdoms: this is understood by many of the kingdom of France. Then shall Christ arise, and his enemies be scattered.

III. THE REASONS WHY CHRIST MUST INCREASE.

1. Because it is the purpose and promise of God. Promised to the church. Jer. xxiii. 5. To Christ himself. Ps. ii. 8; and ex. 1, 2 And he will not alter. Ps. lxxxix. 34, 34.

2. Because for this very purpose God made the world, and he hath committed to Christ the administration of Providence. Isa. ix. 6. To secure the accomplishment of the glorious promises. Matt. xxviii. 18; Eph. i. 22.

2. Because Christ is the beloved of the Father. Matt. iii. 17. He fulfilled his will in the redemption of the world. Phil. ii. 8. And has obtained a name above every name, &c. Phil. ii. 8—10. To conclude, I would observe.

1. Under these circumstances it is in vain for any one to attempt to stop this glorious work. He must increase. Ps. ii. 1—4.

2. What encouragement we have to pray, as our Lord directs, "Thy Kingdom come."

3. How encouraging is the prospect to the friends of Christ? The church will outlive all its enemies. Christ must overcome, he must triumph.

4. And let every one, in their different spheres of action, do all they can to increase the Redeemer's glory. Dreadful shall be the state of those who are unconcerned in this great work. Amos vi. 1, 6; Esther iv. 14

THE SINNER'S FAITH.

Luke vii. 50.—And he said to the woman, Thy faith hath saved thee; go in peace. (S. S.)

To associate with the ungodly world is by no means expedient for those who have been redeemed out of the world. Yet there is a certain degree of intercourse with them which is both proper and desirable. There is a medium between an affecting of their society for our own gratification, and a contemptuous separation from them. Our blessed Lord has exhibited, as in every thing else, so in this also, a perfect pattern. When invited by a Pharisee to dinner, he accepted the invitation with a view to instruct him and Jo

him good: and when a woman who had been a notorious sinner came to him at the Pharisee's house, he did not refuse her admission to his presence, but received with kindness the expressions of her regard, and imparted to her both the blessings and the comforts of his salvation.

The particular notice which our Lord took of the woman's "*faith*," and the reward he gave her on account of it, leads us naturally to consider,

I. THE MARKS AND EVIDENCES OF HER FAITH

The first thing that calls for our attention is,

1. Her zeal.

She had doubtless seen many of our Lord's miracles, and heard many of his discourses; and though she was not yet one of his avowed followers, yet, having received good to her soul, she was desirous of honoring him to the utmost of her power. For this purpose she sought him out in the Pharisee's house, and went to him with a full determination to shew him some signal mark of her regard.

Now this argued no little zeal. She was of the weaker sex, and therefore the more liable to be condemned as officious, impertinent, and obtrusive. She was of a notoriously vile character, and therefore still more obnoxious to insult and contempt. But unmindful of these things, she went uninvited, to the house of a proud Pharisee (where she was least of all likely to meet with any favor) and (indifferent to the construction that might be put upon her conduct by any censorious spectators, or even to the treatment she might receive from them) in the presence of the whole company expressed to him all that was in her heart.

And what was it that enabled her thus to "despise all shame," and to triumph over the fear of man? Doubtless it was her faith: for the apostle says, "This is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith."

2. Her humility.

Though she was bent on executing her pious purpose, she was solicitous to do it in as private and modest a manner as she could. She therefore went behind him as he lay upon the couch,* and, having easy access to his feet, placed herself there, without attracting the notice of the company, or interfering with the conversation that might be passing at table.

This also was a strong mark and evidence of her faith. She knew his august character, and felt herself unworthy to enter into his presence; yea, she accounted it the very summit of her ambition to be permitted to kiss his feet. It was in this way that the faith of the centurion and others shewed itself: Luke vii. 6, 7; Mark v. 25—28; and though, through the remaining pride and ignorance of their hearts, young converts often, like Jehu, seek the notice and applause of men, humility will always be found to exist in the soul in exact proportion to our faith.

3. Her contrition.

No sooner had she placed herself near the Saviour, than all her sins presented themselves to her mind, and filled her with deep compunction. Instantly she burst into a flood of tears, with which she bathed, as it were, the feet of her Lord, while she embraced them, in hopes of finding mercy from the friend of sinners.

Now it is the property of faith to "look on him whom we have pierced, and mourn." Zech. xii. 10. Yea, the more lively faith any have possessed, the more abundant has been their self-loathing and self-abhorrence. Joe

* They did not sit at table as we do, but lay on couches.

xlii. 6; Isa. vi. 5; 1 Tim. i. 15. We cannot doubt therefore but that faith was the principle from whence her humiliation flowed.

4. Her love.

While she wept over the Saviour's feet, she wiped them with the hairs of her head, and kissed them, and anointed them with odoriferous ointment. It was not possible for her to manifest stronger tokens of her affection.

And was not this also an evidence of her faith? Had she been an unbeliever, she would have seen "no beauty or comeliness in Jesus" that deserved her admiration: Isa. liii. 2; but believing in him, she accounted him "fairer than ten thousand, and altogether lovely," Cant. v. 10, 16, according to that declaration of the apostle, To them that believe, he is precious. 1 Peter ii. 7.

5. Her confidence.

She would not have ventured to approach the Pharisee in this manner, because she knew that he would despise her in his heart, and dismiss her with scorn. But she felt no apprehension of such treatment from the Saviour. She well knew his condescension and compassion; and therefore without reserve, and without fear, she cast herself upon his mercy.

In this too she shewed the strength of her faith. Unbelief would have suggested many doubts; Will he receive me? Will he deign to look upon such an abandoned wretch? But faith enabled her to approach him under a full persuasion, that "whosoever came to him should in no wise be cast out."

It was not in vain that she thus approached the Saviour; as we shall see, while we consider,

II. THE FRUITS AND CONSEQUENCES OF HER FAITH.

Though despised and condemned by the Pharisee, she was well rewarded by her Lord. She obtained from him.

1. The pardon of her sins.

Numerous as her iniquities had been, they were all in one moment blotted from the book of God's remembrance. Jesus, who "had all power on earth to forgive sins," pardoned all her offences, and "cast them, as it were, behind him into the very depths of the sea." What a blessed fruit and consequence of her faith was this! Had she been subjected to all the evil treatment that could have been shewn her, she would have had no reason to regret that conduct by which she had obtained so inestimable a blessing.

And was this peculiar to her? Shall not we also have our iniquities forgiven, if we apply to him in humility and faith? Shall the greatness of our sins be any bar to our acceptance with him, if we repent and believe? Let the word of God be deemed worthy of any credit, and all such apprehensions will vanish in an instant— —Acts xiii. 39; Isa. i. 18.

2. An assurance of her acceptance.

Twice did our Lord repeat to her the joyful tidings, that her sins were pardoned, and that her soul was saved; and to confirm it, he bade her depart in peace. What a cordial must this have been to her drooping spirit! How transported must she have been with the joyful sound! And what comfort must she enjoy through life in a sense of the divine favor, and in a prospect of the divine glory!

But neither was this peculiar to her. It is true, that many real christians never attain to this high privilege: but it is owing to the weakness of their faith: if their faith operated as hers did, if it shewed itself in such humility, such contrition, such love, such confidence, such zeal, they also should hear him say to them, "Be of good cheer; thy sins are forgiven thee." What

though he should not utter it by an audible voice from heaven, can he not reveal it to the soul by his Spirit, and enable us to say, "My beloved is mine, and I am his?" Cant. ii. 16. Yes: let us only glorify him to the utmost of our power, and he will give us a peace that passeth all understanding, Phil. iv. 7, and a full assurance of hope unto the end." Heb. vi. 11. See also 2 Tim. i. 12, and iv. 8.

3. Everlasting happiness and glory.

In the declaration of Jesus she received both an earnest and a pledge of her eternal inheritance. Nor can we doubt but that after waiting her "appointed time upon earth," she was admitted to the enjoyment of her Lord in heaven, not any longer to weep at his feet, but to sit with him on his throne, and to participate his glory.

Thus also shall it be with all who truly believe: "they shall never perish, but shall have eternal life"— — — John iii. 16.

From this history we may LEARN,

1. The nature of faith.

We cannot too carefully enquire into the nature of faith; for there is nothing respecting which so many, and such fatal, mistakes are made. Faith is not a mere assent to any doctrines whatsoever; but it is a living principle in the soul, which evidences itself by precisely such a regard to Christ as this woman manifested on this occasion. Would we then ascertain whether our faith be genuine and saving? let us enquire whether it lead us to Christ, in spite of all obstacles from without or from within, with humility and contrition, with love and confidence? For in proportion as we abound in these graces, or are destitute of them, we either possess, or are destitute of, a living faith.

2. The excellence of faith.

Admirable were the graces which this woman exercised; yet not one of them was noticed by our Lord: he overlooked them all; and noticed that only *which was least apparent, and which every one else would have overlooked*, namely, her faith. He knew that this was the root or principle from whence all her other graces sprang. It was this that led her so to honor him; and therefore he determined to honor it. And must not that be excellent which he so highly regarded, so studiously searched out, and so eminently distinguished?

But what is it that he here assigns to her faith? it is nothing less than the saving of her soul: he passes by all her other graces as having no weight or influence whatever in her justification before God, and specifies her "*faith*" as that which "*saved*" her. Is it possible to bestow a higher commendation on it than this?

If it be asked, why faith is thus distinguished above all other graces? we answer, it is because faith unites us unto the Saviour, and interests us thereby in all that he has done and suffered for us: but this cannot be said of any other grace whatever; and therefore, though every other grace *adorns* the soul, no grace but faith will *save* it.

Let us all seek to attain right sentiments on this most important point, and pray with the apostles, "Lord, increase our faith."

3. The condescension of Christ to believing penitents.

If a person of an abandoned character, however changed in his conduct, should come to us when in the midst of company, and that company of a higher order and a pharisaic cast, and should express such affection for us, our pride would be apt to rise; and, while we blushed for the degradation we seemed to suffer, we should be ready to condemn him for his impertinent

intrusion, or perhaps to suspect that he was deranged in his mind. But Jesus accounted himself honored by the testimonies of the woman's regard; and, though he could not but know what reflections would be cast upon his character on account of his kindness to her, he vindicated her conduct, and richly recompensed her kind attentions.

Thus will he do to every believing penitent. He will compensate the scoffs of an unbelieving world by manifest tokens of his approbation. He will not regard the quantity or quality of a man's past offenses; but will speak peace to his soul, and in due time "wipe away all tears from his eyes" for ever. O that we might all consider this, and experience it to our eternal joy!

THE NATURE, SOURCE, AND MEANS OF SPIRITUAL PEACE.

Haggai ii. 9.—In this place will I give peace, saith the Lord of Hosts. (B.)

IF this might be said of the temple at Jerusalem, where the sacrifices of bulls and goats were offered which could not take away sin, the prayers of Old Testament saints were put up, and the Law of Moses was read and expounded; the words may with, at least, equal, if not greater propriety be used of every place under the New Testament dispensation,—a dispensation much more perfect,—where the sacrifice of Christ, which does put away sin, and procure peace with God, is offered, the gospel of peace is proclaimed, the prayers of the New Testament saints are put up and presented through our great High Priest, and the Spirit of peace and love is bestowed.—

Inquire we,

I. INTO THE NATURE OF THE PEACE HERE SPOKEN OF.

To understand this promise, we must observe, that man is by nature an enemy with God.—All are sinners. Rom. iii. 23.—All are under wrath. Rom. i. 18; Eph. ii. 1—3.—There is an enmity on the part of man towards God. Rom. viii. 5—7; Col. i. 21.—Hence, guilt is charged, and condemnation and wrath denounced upon him by God.

The peace here intended includes,

Peace with God; i. e. forgiveness, acceptance, reconciliation with him Rom. v. 1.—When this is witnessed to the soul, by the Spirit of God, the enmity is removed, or the will is subdued, and the affections are brought into captivity to the obedience of Christ; whence spring "love, joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance."—

Peace of conscience; arising from the pardon of past sin, and power over sin. Rom. viii. 1—3; 6, 12—15.—

A *peaceful, serene, and tranquil* state of mind; the will and affections being subdued, and all the tempers changed, and sanctified. Col. iii. 12—15; Phil. iv. 7.—

Peace with all men; injustice, oppression, guile, fraud, covetousness, pride, anger, and other causes of discord and strife, being removed.—

How great the excellency of this peace, and the blessedness of those that possess it!—

II. WHO IS THE AUTHOR OF THIS PEACE, AND THE WAY IN WHICH HE WILL GIVE IT.

It is not ourselves.—Our own works cannot purchase it, nor reconcile God to us. They are all of them imperfect, stained with sin, and instead of procuring favor, deserve divine wrath.—Our own strength and endeavors, and our abstinence and religious duties, of whatever kind, cannot remove the enmity on our part, and reconcile us to God.—Nothing that we have done or can do, can pacify or give peace to an awakened conscience; can produce a really peaceful state of mind; or destroy those evil dispositions, which are the grand hinderences of peace among men.

It is not *others*; not their absolutions, prayers, or advices.—

It is the *gift of God*. He is its author.—It comes from him as a free gift.—His mercy passes by our past sins, and pardons them; thus wrath on his part is removed. His spirit removes our enmity to him; witnesses the pardon of sin, and gives us power over it. Hence we have peace with God, peace of conscience, tranquility of mind, and peace with all men.—But it comes through Christ, the blood of his cross, and the pacification made thereby. Tit. iii. 4—6; Col. i. 20; Eph. ii. 13, 14.—How inestimable the ransom by which we obtain this blessing!—

III. WHO ARE THE SUBJECTS OF IT; OR, THE PERSONS TO WHOM HE WILL GIVE IT.

It is purchased by Christ for all, and offered to all. 2 Cor. v. 18, 19; Isa. lvii. 19.

But it cannot be possessed by the wicked. Isai. lvii. 20. “God is angry with the wicked every day.” Psa. vii. 11. Hence, the necessity of repentance.*

It cannot be the portion of the unbeliever. John iii. 18—36. Hence the necessity of faith.†

Repentance and faith are both the gifts of God, and must be sought in the use of prescribed means, as hearing the word and prayer. We hence obtain the light concerning the method of justification and peace; the sufficiency and grace of Christ are revealed by the Spirit, and our hearts are drawn to him.

IV. THE PLACE WHERE HE WILL GIVE IT, AND THE TIME WHEN.

At all times and places may be considered as holy under the gospel. John iv. 21.

Nevertheless when and where the gospel is preached, and prayer offered to God, repentance and faith are usually given, and Christ in his word and Spirit is peculiarly present. Matt. xviii. 20; xxviii. 20.

THE LIFE AND WALK OF A CHRISTIAN.

Galatians v. 25.—If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit. (B.)

As true christianity is divided into two grand branches, and is partly experimental and partly practical; so, there are two particulars which are chiefly deserving of notice in the character of a real christian; his inward life and his outward conversation. With regard to both of them, he differs essentially, I do not say, merely from profane and immoral persons, but from all

* Describe the nature and fruits of repentance.

† Describe the nature of faith, and the change consequent upon it.

that are carnal and worldly, from all that are not true christians, possessed of the genuine religion of Christ. And no wonder, for the spring and rule of his life and conduct are essentially different in him from what they are in them. They are influenced and directed by the powers of nature, he by the principles of grace; they by the spirit of the world and the customs and habits of men, he by the Spirit of God and the example and laws of Christ. Hence the exhortation of the Apostle in Eph. iv. 17—23, and in the text.—Consider we,

I. THE INWARD LIFE OF A CHRISTIAN.

“If we live *in*,” or rather *by*, “the Spirit.” It is evident the Apostle does not here speak of the life common to all men; for if he had, he needed not have made a supposition, “*if*.” He does not speak, therefore, of natural life, whether animal or rational, consisting in the union of soul and body, and supported by breathing, the circulation of the blood and other fluids, by the reception of food and use of exercise. Nevertheless this is, in a sense, in and by the Spirit of that God who at first “breathed into our nostrils the breath of life,” and “in whom we live move and have our being;” Acts xvii. 28. But he speaks of spiritual and eternal life,—the life which man lost by the fall, Gen. ii. 17, and of which by nature we are all destitute. Eph. ii. 1—3; Col. ii. 13.—This life consists in the knowledge of God, John xvii. 3; his love; 1 John iv. 16; his favor; Ps. xxx. 5; his image; Eph. iv. 24; his heavenly, spiritual, and divine nature.—By this spiritual life we have a title to eternal life, a meetness for it, and a foretaste of it.—As to the vast importance of this life, it is the end of Christ’s incarnation, 1 John iv. 9; John x. 10, of his miracles, his doctrine, and of divine revelation, especially of the gospel, John xx. 31; of the gift of the Holy Spirit, John xiv. 16—19. Indeed—we live by the Spirit, termed a quickening Spirit, John vi. 63; “a Spirit of life.” Rom. viii. 2; the living water, John iv. 10—14; vii. 37, 38; the water of life, Rev. xxi. 6; xxii. 17. Hereby we are awakened, convinced, humbled, converted, and made to experience repentance unto life; living faith. Col. ii. 12, 13; in the living and true God, the gospel, the Lord Jesus, and the promises whereby “the just live;” Heb. x. 38; Gal. ii. 20; an interest in Christ and union with him, John xvii. 20, 21; John xiv. 20; 1 Cor. xii. 13; when we are brought into this union, and only then, we have life, 1 John v. 11, 12; justification unto life, Rom. v. 18; regeneration on our entrance into this spiritual life; sanctification by the same Spirit, 1 Pet. i. 2, whereby this life is continued and perfected.—Those who attain this experience are said to pass from death unto life.—This life is maintained, as well as communicated by the Spirit. If he be grieved, quenched, and done despite unto, it is lost. It is maintained also by the use of means, as the animal life is supported by breathing, food, exercise.—

Thus we “live in the Spirit,” in union and intercourse with the Spirit, which lives and dwells in us, as our bodies live in the air or light of this world.

II. THE WALK OF A CHRISTIAN.

The walk of a christian includes his tempers, words, and works, or his whole deportment. And this walk is *by* the Spirit. See ver. 16—26.—By the guidance of the Spirit, including that of God’s word and providence, Rom. viii. 14.—The support of the Spirit affords courage, fortitude, resolution, power. Eph. iii. 16. The influence and drawings of the Spirit are necessary to it. Christians walk “after the Spirit.” Rom. viii. 1—4. “In

the Spirit;" in the graces and fruits of the Spirit, in love, joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance, ver. 22.—

APPLICATION TO THE HEARERS.

Let me inquire,—Do you live by and in the Spirit? Do you walk by and in the Spirit? If you do not *live* you do not *walk* in the Spirit: we cannot walk without life. If you do not *walk* you do not *live* in the Spirit, or your spiritual life is in a very feeble, dying state. How great the misery of those who do not both *live* and *walk* in the Spirit, and the happiness of those that do! in regard of their own comfort, the glory of God, and the edification of others!—

It should here be shown how the blessing is attained and retained.

THE GOOD WORK OF GOD IN THE SOUL.

Philippians i. 6.—He which hath begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ. (B.)

THE steadfast and consistent profession, which was made by the Philippian christians, "from the first day" of their conversion, until the time he now wrote to them, a period of about twelve years, without ever being turned aside, or dishonoring their holy calling, afforded St. Paul the most heartfelt satisfaction, and a confident expectation that God would carry on the work he had so favorably begun in them, till it should attain perfection, and issue at the second coming of Christ, in their everlasting glory.—

Inquire we,

I. WHAT IS THIS WORK?

It is wrought in us; not only in the church of Christ in general, but in each individual member of it in particular; in the mind and heart, Heb. xiii. 21; 2 Thess. i. 11. Thus it is distinguished from the works of God wrought for us, as those of creation, providence, redemption, justification.—This work wrought in us is performed in every faculty or power of our inward man. It is a work of illumination in the understanding, gradual and increasing; of conviction and awakening in the conscience; of quickening and animating the affections; producing humiliation, shame, sorrow for, and hatred to, sin; esteem, desire, hope, joy, in regard to holiness and the divine author of it;—of conversion, implying the subjection of the will; the mortification, restraint, and due regulation, of the appetites and passions; change in all the dispositions. It is a work, producing divine graces in us, as repentance, spoken of 2 Cor. vii. 10, 11: faith, John vi. 29; 1 Thess. i. 3; 2 Thess. i. 11; Col. ii. 12: hope, 1 Pet. i. 3: love, to God and man, Rom. v. 5; 1 Thess. iii. 12: humility, resignation, patience, contentment, meekness, gentleness, long-suffering, and purity of intention and affection, and universal holiness, or a renewal after the divine image, 2 Cor. iv. 16; Tit. iii. 5.—In general, this work is wounding and healing; killing and making alive; pulling down and building up; breaking up the ground and sowing; stripping and clothing. Acts xiii. 41.

II. HOW DOES IT APPEAR THAT THIS IS A GOOD WORK?

It is painful in its commencement; for a discovery of our sinfulness and guilt, conviction of sin, humiliation, shame, grief for it, are not pleasing to nature; but though not joyous, like affliction at first, it afterwards yields

most pleasant fruit; producing, even on earth, peace, hope, joy, love, and other happy affections, Ps. cxxvi. 5.—It is good, as to its author, God, from whom nothing but good can proceed.—It is good as it respects his motive for working it, love to us.—It is good as to the means and agents, by whom it is effected in us, Christ, the Spirit, the word. 1 Thess. ii. 13. The end is good, even eternal salvation.—

III. WHAT ARE THE PROOFS THAT THIS WORK IS BEGUN?

Many of these are mentioned by the apostle in the context.—“Fellowship in, (or through) the gospel, till now;” ver. 5; a participation with others in the blessings of it, manifested in their hearing, reading, meditating, understanding, and receiving the word, and not departing from it, like the way-side and stony-ground hearers; also, uniting in fellowship with the people of God.—Believing in Christ, ver. 29. The work of faith being in a measure wrought in them, and of consequence the new birth, John i. 12; 1 John v. 1, love, 1 John iv. 7, victory over the world, 1 John v. 4, 5; ii. 15, purity. Acts xv. 9.—Suffering willingly for the gospel, like the apostle, and thus being “partakers of his grace,” ver. 7, 29, not forsaking him in his bonds, and when he stood up in defence of the gospel, but sharing in the reproach and persecution he endured; the faith and patience they thus exercised, proving the reality of their grace.—Rejoicing in Christ, ver. 26.—“Shining as lights in the world” by their unblamable and useful life, chap. ii. 15.—

IV. ST. PAUL'S CONFIDENCE THAT GOD WOULD CARRY ON HIS WORK IN THEM.

If God had not been willing to carry it on, he would not have begun it.—It is true, God works by means; but they were willing to use, and did actually use, and resolved to continue to use, the means.—Their perseverance, however, was not infallible. See ch. ii. 12, 13; Gal. v. 4.—

APPLICATION.

To sinners. Is this good work begun?—You answer, “I do so and so.” But what hath God done? hath he wrought in you to will and to do? Is it a good work, to rail, to lie, to cheat, &c.; to be proud, self-willed, discontented, envious, &c.?—*To mourners.* “He will not break the bruised reed.” Matt. xii. 20. He hath wrought in you repentance, he will work faith; he hath convinced, he will convert; he hath wounded, he will heal; Hos. vi. 1; he hath brought down, and given sorrow, he will exalt and cause joy.—*To believers.* The work is but begun: the foundation is laid, that the superstructure may be raised; the tree is planted, that it may bear fruit; the child of God is born of his Spirit, that he may grow up from a babe to a young man and a father; the laborer is hired into the vineyard, that he may work.

THE SUCCESS OF THE GOSPEL IN THE DAYS OF THE APOSTLES.

Acts xii. 24.—But the word grew and was multiplied. (Sk.)

WHEN Christ appeared on earth, he was opposed to the wicked Jews; and, after his ascension into heaven, his holy apostles were opposed both by Jews and Gentiles. The heathen nations raged, and the professing people of God imagined a vain thing; but the Lord laughed them to scorn, and had

them in derision, Ps. ii. 1—4. Herod the king persecuted the church, because it pleased the Jews; but when he robbed God of his glory, by allowing the people to pay him divine honors, he was eaten up of worms, ver. 23. Let us consider the opposition which was made to the word in those days: its rapid success; and the principal means of its extensive promulgation.

I. THE WORD WAS OPPOSED.

1. *By the word we may understand the gospel of God our Saviour.* This was sent in the first instance to the Jews. Hence the apostle Paul said to the Jews at Antioch, "Men and brethren, children of the stock of Abraham, and whosoever among you feareth God, to you is the word of this salvation sent," chap. xiii. 26. It is fitly called a word of salvation, as it explains the cause of salvation; points out the terms of salvation; explains its nature and extent; and offers salvation to all who believe, Mark xv. 16.

2. *Jewish prejudices opposed the gospel.* The Jews were fond of pomp and parade; they admired the letter of the law; but they were proud, formal, and carnal. No wonder that they opposed that word which required humility, Luke xiv. 11. They could not endure the spirituality of the gospel, Rom. ii. 28, 29. And their prejudices were strong against regeneration; because they were ignorant of its nature, and were under the dominion of sin and death, John iii. 3; Rom. vii. 24.

3. *Heathenish superstitions were opposed to the word.* They had imaginary gods without number; they had priests whom they revered, and who kept them in darkness; and they had an impure worship to which they were superstitiously attached. Christianity took away their gods, exposed their priests, and threw down their idolatrous temples and altars. Can we wonder that they rose up in arms against the word? Their craft was in danger; for the preaching of the gospel turned the world upside down, Acts xvii. 6.

4. *Human learning was opposed to the word of God.* The Greeks and Romans excelled in learning; but that learning produced bad effects. They were self-confident, proud, and apt to boast. The gospel was plain, clear, and simple; and it rendered all their fine reasonings, and all their displays of oratory, completely useless. Hence they could not endure it. It appeared to them foolishness, and unworthy to be received by philosophers, who imagined they knew more than either the Jewish prophets or Christ and his apostles.

5. *The devil opposed the gospel, by his influence and agency on the hearts of men.* Thousands, who were ignorant of his devices, were led by him into error and sin. He stirred up all his servants, whether Jews or Gentiles, to oppose the word. We have an instance of this kind in *Elymas*, whom Paul called a child of the devil, because he perverted the right ways of the Lord, under the influence and agency of that wicked spirit, Acts xiii. 8—10.

6. *In spreading the word, the apostles had to endure many grievous afflictions, both from wicked men and evil spirits.* They were treated with scorn and contempt; they suffered bonds and imprisonment, hunger and nakedness, hardships and deaths, 1 Cor. iv. 11—13; 2 Cor. iv. 8—11. But they were strengthened and supported by the Lord; and their labors were crowned with success.

II. OPPOSITION DID NOT PREVENT THE RAPID SUCCESS OF THE GOSPEL; FOR THE WORD GREW AND WAS MULTIPLIED.

1. *The word is fitly compared to good seed.* Our Lord used this figure

in his parable of the sower, where he says, "The seed is the word of God, Luke viii. 11. And the apostle Paul says, in reference to a preached gospel, "We have sown unto you spiritual things," 1 Cor. ix. 11.

2. *This seed was sown by the apostles in prepared hearts*; and it cannot bring forth good fruit unless the heart be prepared. When men repent, and seek the Lord, the *fallow ground* of their hearts is broken up, Hos. x. 12. The sinner is then convinced of sin; mourns under a sense of sin; and inquires, "What must I do to be saved?" Acts xvi. 30.

3. *When the word sinks into the heart, and takes deep root, it produces holy tempers and holy actions*; and when we abound in these, the word grows in us, and our prayers go up to God with acceptance. "If ye abide in me, and my words abide in you, ye shall ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you," John xv. 7. Then we see the grace of God in its wondrous effects. How it grows we know not; but we have sufficient proof of its growth, when we see the blade, the ear, and then the full corn in the ear, Mark x. 28.

4. *The word is multiplied when many are converted to God by the instrumentality of converts*. One grain may produce *fifty*, and another a *hundred*. In those days one convert was frequently the honored instrument of bringing many to Christ, so that the word spread in all directions. Every member of the church felt it his duty to do what he could for his Lord and Master; and when this is the case, the word multiplies, by the blessing of God, Acts viii. 4.

II. BUT WHAT WERE THE PRINCIPAL CAUSES OF THE EXTENSIVE PROMULGATION OF THE GOSPEL IN THE AGE OF THE APOSTLES?

1. *The extraordinary gifts of the Spirit, conferred on the apostles, and on many in the church, promoted the success of the gospel*. They spake with tongues, and wrought miracles; a plain proof that God was with them, and that he was the Author of that religion which they taught and enforced, Acts vi. 7, 8.

2. Another cause of the rapid spread of the gospel in those days, was *the burning zeal of the apostles and primitive Christians*. They were always zealously affected in a good cause, Gal. iv. 18. Under the influence of this principle, they were diligent in the use of means; they were courageous; and did all things heartily as to the Lord, Col. iii. 23.

3. *Divine power attended the word*. This was absolutely necessary; for without that power nothing could have been accomplished, 1 Cor. ii. 4. Paul planted, and Apollos watered; but God gave the increase, 1 Cor. iii. 6; 1 Thess. i. 5. And when the word was clothed with divine power, it was "sharper than any two-edged sword," Heb. iv. 12.

4. *The holy tempers, and the holy conduct of the apostles, and of the first believers, produced powerful effects on the hearts of the people*. They were patient in sufferings; meek under provocations; and ever ready to forgive injuries. They were diligent in business; just in their dealings; and faithful to their promises. And when men saw their "good works, they glorified God," Matt. v. 16.

5. *The unity of the church gave success to the word*. They were closely united in affection, and all aimed at the same things, namely, the glory of God and the salvation of men. Their love to one another was proverbial. When the world saw this, and considered it as the fruit of christianity, many believed, and turned from dumb idols to the *living God*, Heb. x. 24.

6. *Persecution promoted the cause of Christ, and gave success to the word*. It discovered the *vileness* of the persecutors, and the *real worth* of

the persecuted. The one was *abhorred*, and the other *admired*. Hence the word of those holy and injured persons took effect; and it was frequently said, "The blood of the martyrs is the seed of the church."

7. *Judgments poured out on wicked men, and on persecutors, gave success to the gospel.* When Ananias and Sapphira were struck dead, "Great fear came upon all the church, and as many as heard these things," Acts v. 11. When Herod died by the visitation of God, the word grew and was multiplied; and when Elymas was struck blind, Sergius Paulus believed the word, Acts xiii. 12.

8. *The united prayers of the church gave success to the word.* All were crying out day and night, "Thy kingdom come." All prayed for the prosperity of the word, 2 Thess. iii. 1. And much prayer must be offered up in one day, if we would see a revival of religion, and a rapid spread of christianity, Heb. iii. 2.

INFERENCES.

1. How widely different was the propagation of Christianity from that of Mohammedism! The one was by the force of truth, and holy example; but the other was by the sword, and acts of violence!

2. The effects of primitive times have reached us in these last days. We have the truth which was then taught; we have christian ordinances and christian ministers. Miracles have ceased; but grace still abounds, 1 Tim. i. 15.

3. We lay no claim to apostolical gifts; but God has opened a wide door, in our day, for the spread of his gospel. Let us imitate the piety and zeal of the first christians; and may we live to see the blessed days of the Son of man! Amen.

THE CENTURION'S SERVANT HEALED.

Luke vii. 6, 7.—Then Jesus went with them: and when he was not far from the house, the Centurion sent friends to him, saying unto him, Lord, trouble not thyself: for I am not worthy that thou shouldest enter under my roof; wherefore neither thought I myself worthy to come unto thee: but say in a word, and my servant shall be healed. (S. S.)

Nothing makes a wider breach among men than a difference in political and religious opinion—

But mutual good offices would greatly counteract this evil—

Though we can never hope to soften the rancour of all, we may by persevering kindness conciliate the esteem of many—

We have before us a remarkable instance of the efficacy of such conduct—

The Centurion was an heathen, an officer of an hostile nation, stationed in Judea to keep the Jews in subjection—

But instead of oppressing the Jews he had shewed them much favour—

He, in his turn, needed their good offices on behalf of his servant—

And they gladly became his advocates and intercessors—

They even prevailed on Jesus to work a miracle on his behalf—

To elucidate this miracle we shall consider,

I. THE CENTURION'S CHARACTER.

Soldiers, for the most part, are unfavorably circumstanced with respect to religion—

But here was one, though an heathen, whose character may well put to shame the greater part of the christian world—we may observe,

1. His love to his fellow-creatures.

His servant was grievously afflicted with the palsy nigh unto death—Compare Matt. viii. 6, with Luke vii. 2.

In this disorder, persons can do nothing for others, or even for themselves—

And in such a state, even dear friends and relatives are ready to think the care of one an heavy burthen—

Yet this Centurion administered to his servant with the tenderest affection—

And interested all he could in the promotion of his welfare—*

What could the servant himself have done more for the kindest master?

2. His piety towards God.

He had not embraced either the doctrines or discipline of the Jewish church—

But he had learned to acknowledge the only true God—

And he was glad to promote the worship of God, even though he himself did not acquiesce in the peculiar mode in which he was worshipped—

He even built a synagogue for the Jews at his own expense, ver. 5.

What an admirable pattern of liberality and candor!—

How different from those who will not do any thing without the pale of their own church!—

Surely he never afterwards regretted that he had so applied his wealth—

3. His low thoughts of himself.

He did not arrogate any thing to himself on account of his rank and authority—

Nor did he value himself on his benevolence to man and zeal for God—

While others judged him worthy that a miracle should be wrought for him, he accounted himself unworthy of the smallest favor—

This was the reason of his forbearing to wait on our Lord in person—†

How lovely does such an one appear in the eyes of God and man!—

4. His exalted thoughts of Christ.

He judged our Lord to be too holy to admit of converse with an heathen

He believed also that Jesus could effect whatsoever he pleased, by a word, and at a distance, without the intervention of any means, ver. 7.

Nor did he doubt but that universal nature was subject to his will far more than the most obedient soldier could be to the commands of his officer, ver. 8.

Thus did he ascribe to Jesus a power proper to God alone, Deut. xxxii. 39.

Well might our Lord's address to the discreet Scribe have been applied to him, Mark xii. 34.

Such a character as this could never meet with a repulse from Jesus.

II. THE KINDNESS VOUCHSAFED TO HIM BY OUR LORD.

Instantly at the request of the elders Jesus set off to the Centurion's house—

He who, though repeatedly importuned, declined to visit a *Nobleman's son*, John iv. 46—50, went, at the very first summons, to attend upon a *Centurion's servant*—

* He applied to some of the Jewish elders to use their interest with Jesus on his behalf.

† On our Lord's near approach to the house, the same humility that had kept the Centurion from going to him, compelled him, as it were, to go, lest he should seem guilty of disrespect. Compare Matt. v. 13, with the text

And no sooner met the Centurion, than he richly recompensed his assiduity.

1. He expressed his admiration of the Centurion's faith.

We never hear of Jesus admiring the things of this world—

He rather checked in his disciples such ill-judged veneration, Mark xiii.

1, 2.

But when he beheld the Centurion's faith, "he marvelled at it"—

Not that such exercise of grace was *really* unexpected by him—

Jesus both knew what was in the Centurion's heart, John ii. 25, and had planted there the very grace which he exercised, John i. 16.

But Jesus, as our exemplar, would teach *us* what to admire—

And shew us that the smallest portion of true faith cannot be estimated too highly, 2 Peter i. 1.

Our Lord declared in his very presence, that this faith had not been equalled by any even of the Israelites themselves, ver. 9.

Such approbation from *his* mouth could not fail of comforting the afflicted Centurion—

2. He wrought the desired miracle in confirmation of his faith.

By a simple act of his will he restored the servant to perfect health—

And told the Centurion that it should "be to him according to his faith"—

Thus he removed the distress of the family in an instant—

Thus too he confirmed the faith which had shone forth so nobly—

And shewed that we could never expect too much at his hands—

What advantage for *eternal* life did the Centurion derive from hence!—

With what lively hope might he apply to Jesus for the healing of his soul!—

We can never suppose that such love and piety, such humility and faith were left to perish—

No, verily—That declaration shall be found true to all eternity, 1 Sam. ii. 30.

3. He declared that many such persons should be saved, while many, with clearer light and higher privileges, should be cast out.

They who profess the true religion may be called "the children of the kingdom"—

But how many of them are destitute of the attainments this heathen had made!—

How many would have imitated that vile Amalekite rather than him!— 1 Sam. xxx. 13.

How many grudge the necessary *contributions* for *keeping up* the houses of God!—*

What doubting of Christ's power and grace, yea, what a proud conceit too of their own worthiness, is to be found among professing christians!—

Surely what our Lord said respecting the unbelieving Jews shall be realized in christians of this character, Matt. viii. 12.

And the humbler heathens, who walked agreeably to the light that they enjoyed, shall be preferred before them—

Nor can we doubt but that the Centurion, in reference to whom these things were spoken, shall be among that blessed number—

APPLICATION.

Let us then learn to plead earnestly for ourselves— — —

* What a contrast to him who, *entirely at his own expense, erected a synagogue for people of another communion!*

Nor let a sense of unworthiness keep us from carrying our wants to Jesus— — —

Let us also sympathize with, and intercede for others—

Job, like the Centurion, found benefit from his own intercessions—Job xlii. 10.

Nor shall *our* supplications be in vain either for ourselves or others.

JAIKUS' DAUGHTER HEALED.

Luke viii. 50.—When Jesus heard it, he answered him, saying, Fear not : believe only, and she shall be made whole. (S. S.)

AFFLICTIONS may well be deprecated by us as painful to flesh and blood—

But they are often the means of humbling us before God—

Multitudes came as suppliants to our Lord who would never have regarded him if they had not felt the pressure of disease or trouble—

The rich in general were the most backward to acknowledge him—

But they found that in the hour of affliction none other could do them good—

Hence occasionally we see the opulent presenting their supplications before him—

Nor did he reject the suit of any, whether they were rich or poor—

The answer he gave to a ruler of the synagogue is recorded in the text—

And it will naturally lead us to notice the rulers's faith.

I. How IT WAS TRIED.

Jairus (such was his name) had much to try his faith.

He had an only child (twelve years of age) in dying circumstances—

Having heard much of our Lord's miracles, he applied to him on behalf of his daughter—

And earnestly requested him to come and restore her health—

But while he was returning with Jesus to his house, his servants brought tidings that the child was dead—

This was a dreadful shock to the parent's feelings—

And might have utterly destroyed all his hopes—

Thus it is that the faith of God's people is often tried.

They are enabled to make application to their God and Saviour—

But the storm in the meantime gathers thick around them—

Their difficulties so increase, that their hopes seem almost blasted—

They have cried for pardon, and find only an increasing sense of guilt—

They have prayed for deliverance from corruption or temptation, and experienced the assaults of Satan more violent than ever—

Thus they are almost ready to think that God has cast out their prayer, and shut up his tender mercies from them—

It was in this manner that holy Job was tried—

Yea, the experience of most, however diversified, is generally found to agree in this. Ps. cvii. 5, 6, 12, 13, 18, 19, 26, 27, 28.

But this accumulated trouble, was permitted for the further exercise of the ruler's faith.

II. How IT OPERATED.

He was enabled humbly and confidently to depend on Jesus.

It was his faith that first led him to Jesus for help—

Nor, when his case seemed desperate, did he give up his hope—

It is probable that our Lord might perceive some rising apprehensions in his mind—

But he sustained him instantly with that encouraging word, “Fear not”—

Jairus expected now that his child should be raised as from a sleep—

The idea of sleep, however, only called forth the derision of the mourners—

Such was the fruit of their ignorance and unbelief—

But the ruler himself resembled the father of the faithful, Rom iv. 18, 20, 21.—

It is in this way that true faith will ever shew itself.

It will surely lead us to Jesus for relief—

It will make us humble and importunate in our supplications to him—

We shall not presently turn from him because our difficulties increase—

We shall rather adopt the expressions of holy Job, Job xiii. 15.

Unbelief may prompt us to deride what we do not understand—

But faith will make us acquiesce in God’s declarations, though we cannot fully comprehend them—

And expect the accomplishment of his promises, however his providence may appear to contradict them—

Jesus did not fail to respect the faith that honored him.

III. HOW IT WAS REWARDED.

Jesus answered the ruler to the full extent of all his wishes.

Our Lord reproved the excessive lamentations of the people—

And encouraged them to expect the restoration of the child—

But he would not suffer those who had derided him to be spectators of the miracle—

He took with him, however, persons sufficient to attest it—

He favored the believing parents with admission to behold it—

And restored their daughter, as it had been from sleep, in their very presence—

The child arose instantly, and walked as in perfect health—

For their further conviction he ordered food to be given to the child—

By this also he intimated, that though she was restored by a miracle, she was to be kept alive by natural means—

What a rich reward was this to the believing suppliant—

Nor shall any one who asks in faith, be disappointed.

Our Lord has commanded us to ask in faith, Mark xi. 24.—

And has assured us that petitions, so offered, shall be answered by him Matt. xxi. 22.—

Things the most impossible to man, shall, if they will conduce to our good and to God’s honor, be effected by the prayer of faith, Mark ix. 23.—

Crimes the most atrocious that ever were committed, shall be pardoned, Acts xiii. 39.

Lusts the most inveterate that ever enslaved a soul, shall be subdued. Isai. lxi. 19. 1 Cor. vi. 11.

The dead in trespasses and sins shall be raised, like Christ himself, to a new and heavenly life, Eph. i. 19, 20, with ii. 5, 6.

Nor shall they fail of attaining eternal happiness in heaven, John iii. 15 Isaiah xlv. 17.

APPLICATION.

Every man must expect trouble in this vale of tears—

The dearest friends must look forward to a day of separation—

But let every trouble drive us to the compassionate Jesus—

And every want be spread before him in prayer, Phil. iv. 6.

We are not now indeed to expect *miraculous* interpositions—

Nor ought we to ask for *temporal* blessings in an unqualified manner—

We should commit the concerns of this life to his all-wise disposal—

But for *spiritual* blessings we cannot be too importunate—

Nor can our faith in his word be too strong—

What he said to Martha he still says to us, John xi. 40.—

The advice of Jehosaphat is the best direction we can follow, 2 Chron
xx. 20.—

Let us not then limit his tender mercies—

If we resemble the Samaritan lord, we shall fare like him, 2 Kings vii.
2—17.

Let us not in renewed troubles be like the unbelieving Jews, Ps. lxxviii.
20.—

But let us bear in mind that encouraging declaration, Eph. iii. 20.—

And determine henceforth to live like the apostle, Gal. ii. 20.

GROWING IN GRACE.

2 Peter iii. 18.—But grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. To him be glory, both now and for ever, Amen. (Sk.)

ONE of the most pleasing traits in the character of a genuine christian pastor, is his generous, disinterested concern for the present and everlasting welfare of those whom the chief Shepherd has committed to his care. And it is peculiarly delightful to find the same disposition operating with unabated vigor, amidst an almost endless variety of cares and troubles, and after many years of separation have elapsed. This heavenly temper is more or less observable in all the epistles of the New Testament. Hear Paul's declaration to the Thessalonians, "For now we live, if ye stand fast in the Lord." Hear also how he felt, and how he prayed for the Ephesians; see chap. iii. 13—19. In the same spirit, Peter, also, endeavors to guard his christian converts against the principles and practices of infidels and scoffers, by pressing on their attention the importance of activity and perseverance in the great business of the soul's salvation, "Wherefore the rather, brethren, give diligence," &c., chap. i. 10—13. And in conclusion he says, "But grow in grace," &c. This is a subject to be *explained, recommended, and practised*. We therefore inquire,

I. WHAT IS MEANT BY GROWING IN GRACE? The word grace means favor, kindness, friendly affection. Hence the phrase, so common in scripture, of finding grace in the eyes or sight of a person, Gen. xxxiv. 11; 2 Sam. xvi. 4; Esther ii. 17. And hence, as it respects God, we are said to be "*justified freely by his grace*," Rom. iii. 24. But the word is also variously applied to the *operations* and *effects* of this free favor. We at present consider it in two senses. First, As it expresses that *state* or *condition* of adoption and reconciliation into which believers are brought, Rom. v. 1. 2.—And, secondly, As it denotes *divine assistance*, afforded "in time of need," 2 Cor. xii. 9, through which the believer is "*strengthened with might by*

the Spirit in the inner man," Eph. iii. 16. Here we must be indulged in a few remarks.

1. 'This state of reconciliation, &c., is not that of mankind in general; but is contra-distinguished from a state of *nature*, in which evil principles produce works of wickedness, which, as well as the workers of them, "God's soul hateth," Ps. xi. 5. "By nature we are children of wrath," Eph. ii. 3, "and God is *angry* with the wicked," &c., Ps. vii. 11; Isa. xii. 1—3.

2. Wherever there is that *relative* change, by which a penitent is adopted into the family of God, there is also a *real* change in the man's principles and practice;—a change of *nature*, as well as of condition. Indeed, the real change, which begins in repentance, whereby we sorrow for, hate, and forsake sin, precedes that faith whereby we believe with the heart unto righteousness;—and which farther purifies the heart, Matt. iv. 17; Acts xx. 21. Yet,

3. 'The change is not so complete as not to admit of improvement; therefore the text says, "*Grow in grace.*" As grace means free favor, this may refer to an advancement in the favor of God. God loves, and must love holiness. It is his own nature; and the more of it any person has, with the greater complacency does God regard him. He calls Abraham his friend; and John was "the disciple whom Jesus (peculiarly) loved." But the principal idea intended to be conveyed, seems to be that of improvement. Illustrate by the example of "little children," &c., John i; Eph. i. 12—14. The growth here enjoined, may well include, and must consist with, 1. An improvement in knowledge;—"the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ," that ye may be freed from the mistakes, confusion, and imbecility of infancy; and that your views of his *person* and *work*, and of your christian privileges, may be more *correct*, Eph. iv. 13, 14,—more clear, chap. i. 17—19,—and more comprehensive, chap. iii. 14—19. This will be attended with, 2. A corresponding improvement in *strength*; from childhood—to *youth*—to *maturity*. "The righteous shall be stronger and stronger," Job xvii. 9. And 3. An improvement in *usefulness*,—that, in uniting in yourselves the experience, firmness, prudence, &c., of mature age, with parental solicitude, ye may be *nursing fathers* to the church, and "mothers in Israel." With a view to recommend the subject, we inquire,

II. WHAT ARE THE ADVANTAGES OF GROWING IN GRACE? The improvement is,

1. *A personal advantage.* The christian's life is, in a great measure, made up of *doing* and *suffering*. An increase of grace will enable him to do the will of God more *easily*, and more *effectually*, Col. i. 9, 10; and to *suffer* it more *patiently* and *cheerfully*, v. 11. It is,

2. *A social advantage.* Society will be so far preserved from the baleful effects of *error*, *inconsistency*, &c. And many *good* things will be *done*, and *well done*, in the world, the church, the family, &c., which would otherwise be left undone, Phil. i. 9—11. Hence it is,

3. *An advantage to the cause of religion.* There is a pathos in the address, and an energy in the pious actions of an *eminently holy and thriving* soul, that can hardly fail to take effect.

4. It will advance *the glory of God*. It is he, who, through Jesus Christ, bestows grace, whereby we serve him acceptably;—and "serve our generation" according to his will;—and *endure* as seeing the Invisible, Matt. v. 13—16. Wherefore to him, as the *Origin* of good, and according to the

apostle's wish, to "our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, as *Mediator*, be glory, both now and for ever." Amen.

But this is a subject to be reduced to practice. It remains, therefore, that we inquire,

III. WHAT ARE THE MEANS OF GROWING IN GRACE? On this subject we may avail ourselves of what experience teaches us concerning the means which conduce to bodily health and improvement; among which are, proper care—proper nutriment—and proper exercise.

1. *Proper care*. This is so necessary, that before your children are capable of taking care of themselves, you anxiously keep them out of the way of harm. Observe, here, Paul's solicitude; "As a nurse cherisheth her children," &c., "*warning every man*;"—"we *charged every one of you*," &c., 1 Thess. ii. 7—11; Col. i. 28. And when we reach the years of discretion, we still find it necessary to guard against pestilential effluvia, accidental injuries, destructive practices, &c. So should we, in spirituals, avoid the pestilential atmosphere of the wicked;—"take heed, lest we fall;"—"flee youthful lusts, which war against the soul," &c., 1 Cor. xv. 33; Prov. iv. 14, 15.

2. *Proper nutriment*;—rejecting, of course, what is *useless*; and, more especially, whatever is *deleterious*. Much of what is useless, and much of what is poisonous, is to be met with, both in *conversation* and in *print*. Reject it; and seek that which will afford nourishment:—in, 1. *Hearing and reading the word*, 1 Pet. ii. 2. 2. *Biography of persons whose pious life, and happy death*, have exemplified the truth of scripture. 3. *Christian conversation*. 4. *Prayer*; and, in fine, every appointed or prudential means of grace.

3. *Proper exercise*. Without this, the most robust *body* will sink rapidly into the hands of the physician; and through them, into the grave. So, "health of mind is exercise; not rest." By reason of *use*, our senses are exercised to discern both good and evil, Heb. v. 13, 14; see also Matt. xiii. 12; Luke xix. 20—26. Have you a measure of faith, love, humility, patience? &c. *Use* grace, and *have* grace.

Remind the sinner of the awfulness of his case. "The *wrath* of God is revealed," &c., and it *abideth on him*, Rom. i. 18; John iii. 36; 2 Thess. i. 8, 9.

Let the feeble-minded remember, that grace admits of growth. "Who hath despised the day of small things?" Isa. xl. 11; Heb. iv. 15, 16.

On *adult believers*, the necessity of a farther growth should be urged—to prevent *apostasy*, ch. i. 1—9, and iii. 17,—to prevent *perdition*, ch. ii. 20; John xv. 6. And they may be *encouraged*, by the hope of "an entrance, ministered unto them abundantly, into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ," ch. i. 10, 11.

SPIRITUAL HEALTH.

Isa. liii. 5.—With his stripes we are healed. (Sk.)

FOR the transcendant importance of its matter, and the minuteness and accuracy of its prophetic descriptions, this chapter occupies an unrivalled eminence amongst the writings of the Jewish seers. Here we have the humil-

ity of the Redeemer specified, ver. 2;—the contemptuous ideas of men respecting him described, ver. 3;—the acuteness of his sufferings asserted, ver. 8, 9;—the patience with which he endured his peerless sorrows anticipated, ver. 7;—and the grand design of the whole announced, ver. 4, 5, 6. Yea; such is the luminous and evangelical glory which pours upon our astonished vision in this portion of Scripture, that we almost forget that its inspired author lived near seven hundred years before the important events which he predicted took place; we are inadvertently rather inclined to associate him with the eye witnesses of the sorrows of the Son of God. Under the influence of these considerations, we do not wonder that even the licentious Rochester, when immured in the chamber of affliction, should, by a calm investigation of this chapter, have been fully convinced of the authenticity of those Scriptures which had before constituted the butt of his profane ridicule; and, through divine mercy, rendered capable of subscribing to the words of our text, “With his stripes we are healed.” With fervent aspirations to God for his blessing, let us proceed to discuss this truly interesting passage, in which we have,

I. A LAMENTABLE DISEASE ASSUMED.

II. AN INFALLIBLE PHYSICIAN SPECIFIED.

III. HIS MODE OF OPERATION DESCRIBED.

IV. AN EXTRAORDINARY CURE ASSERTED.

1. As there can be no cure effected where no disease exists, the assumption of disease is inseparably connected with this passage. The sacred Scriptures abound with figurative modes of expression; hence the diseases of the body have been used as a medium of representing the moral pravity of human nature, Isa. i. 5, 6; Jer. viii. 21, 22. In attending to the prophet's figure, we shall consider the spiritual disease of man, as,

1. *The baneful result of transgression.* When God had formed man of the dust, and breathed into him the breath of life, he pronounced him “very good,” and doubtless this approving testimony had both a moral and a physical application; but, alas! how are the mighty fallen!—how unlike the production of a holy and omniscient Being!—Man unhappily violated the paradisiacal commandment—mingled his pristine glory in the abyss of ruin—and introduced a hideous train of ills, of every shape and size:—and among these, a fixed inveterate aptitude to evil, holds a very prominent place, Gen. iii. 1—8; Rom. v. 12.

2. *Universal in its prevalence.* Some diseases of the body affect particular parts; others diffuse their influence through the whole system. This moral disease pervades the whole man; every member of the body, and every faculty of the soul, is thoroughly infected and deranged, Gen. vi. 5, Job xviii. 4; Mark viii. 21, 22;—and these baneful effects of the fall are diffused through the whole human kind. As totally as the man is fallen and depraved, so is the whole of his species involved in ruin; infancy—childhood—youth—and tottering age—present indisputable evidence in proof of this humbling fact, Isa. liii. 6; Rom. iii. 10, 11, 23.

3. *Hereditary in its descent.* Some diseases of the body are unhappily entailed on posterity, and are transmitted in regular succession from father to son:—of this nature is the moral malady assumed in our text:—it has descended in one unbroken line, from the first guilty pair in Eden's garden, down to your preacher and his present audience;—hence no happy intervening age of paradisiacal innocence has adorned the page of history;—hence the biographical details of ages have not broken the painful monotony of human guilt, by the exhibition of one happy individual in a state of unmixed,

underived, pristine purity. The lineaments of moral pravity in the father, have been strikingly manifest in the son, Gen. iv. 1—8, viii. 21.

4. *Incurable by human energy.* The diseases of the human body frequently baffle the utmost skill of the medical science. All the wisdom and power of man have been exercised to impede the progress of this spiritual malady, but to little or no purpose; the senators of Greece and Rome have enacted laws, and the philosophers of both countries have disseminated their ethics abroad; but the radical principle of evil in the human breast has defied all their efforts—nothing less than a Divine Physician can effect a cure, Job. xiv. 4; Jer. xiii. 23.

II. AN INFALLIBLE PHYSICIAN SPECIFIED. Man has not been abandoned to his spiritual self-induced malady, without hope or help;—mercy has interposed—a physician has been provided—and one possessing the most ample qualifications, John iii. 14—17. He is,

1. *Infinite in wisdom.* Wisdom is necessary in order both to understand the disease, and properly to apply the remedy. Jesus, our Divine Physician, is “the wisdom of God.”—He comprehends our spiritual affliction in all its ramifications—he cannot be deceived by false appearances, for “he knoweth what is in man, and needeth not that any should tell him,” Jer. xvii. 9, 10; John i. 1—5, 14.

2. *Impartial in his attendance.* Man, in every station in life, is susceptible of partial feeling; the medical profession cannot be expected to be free from its influences. The splendor of the palace, and the grandeur of nobility, are more attractive than the humble cottage of the peasant; but the physician before us, is equally attentive to high and low—rich and poor—learned and illiterate;—yea, and is able to attend to the necessities of all at the same moment, Ezek. xxxiii. 17—19; Mark x. 46—52; Luke vii. 1—10.

3. *Ever easy of access.* Medical practitioners of great celebrity, in order to secure leisure for the purposes of health and domestic duties, are obliged to render themselves inaccessible at certain periods; but Jesus, the infallible Physician of souls, is ever easy of approach. This appears evident from his kind invitations, Isa. i. 18; Matt. xi. 28, 29;—his solemn declarations, Ezek. xxxiii. 11, 12; Matt. xxii. 37;—and his gracious promises, John vi. 37; 1 John i. 9;—as also from the uniform testimony of experience, in all ages, Psa. xxxiv. 18; cxviii. 21; Rom. x. 12, 13.

4. *Gratuitous in his practice.* It is just and proper that the exercise of skill and attention should be reasonably remunerated. But such is the peculiar excellence of this spiritual Physician, that a cure can only be obtained on gratuitous terms. The salvation of the gospel is “without money and without price;” and this method of deliverance is exactly adapted to our ruined condition, Isa. lv. 1, 2; Rom. iii. 24; Eph. ii. 8—10.

III. HIS MODE OF OPERATION DESCRIBED;—“With his stripes.” The stripes which were inflicted on the blessed Redeemer, were connected with that death to which he gave himself for the life of the world, when “he bore our sins in his own body on the tree.” This atonement, and faith in this atonement, are the only means of a sinner’s acceptance with God; the only method by which a cure can be obtained, John iii. 36. This method is,

1. *Divine in its appointment.* It is not the fruit of the human imagination; the production of councils, or synods, however learned, or important; but the offspring of Jehovah; it comes to us under the sanction of the Deity, Isa. xxviii. 16; John iii. 16, 17.

2. *Easy in its application.* Not animal oblations—tedious pilgrimages—course of painful penance—nor any of the other inventions of human

error;—but “repent and believe.” The power is given, and its exercise is required, Acts iii. 19; xvi. 31.

3. *Universal in its adaptation.* The gospel way of salvation is admirably suited to all the possible constitutions, situations, and conditions of men, of every “nation, kindred, people, and tongue,” Rom. x. 4—13; Acts ii. 9—11; 37—42.

4. *Infallible in its efficacy.* No case is too intricate, none too desperate, to admit of a cure: no individual in any age of time, ever made a scriptural application and was disappointed. The antediluvian saints realized its efficacy by an anticipating faith; the evangelists and apostles by immediate application; and believers since, by a retrospective reference to the sacrifice of Christ, have proved that he is “able to save to the uttermost them that come to God by him.”

IV. AN EXTRAORDINARY CURE ASSERTED;—“We are healed.” Were mortal ears susceptible of celestial testimony, the loud hosannas of the blood-washed throng on high would amply support this assertion; and multitudes of terrestrial saints would echo back the sound! Can we from experience adopt the sentiment?—This cure may be considered, as,

1. *Radical in its nature.* The cure effected by this Physician is not the removal of external symptoms, while the principle is unrenovated; not breaking off a few gross evils, while the seat of depravity is untouched; but, the understanding is enlightened; the will divinely influenced; the affections properly directed; the imagination spiritualized; and the memory sanctified; in short, the heart entirely changed, Ezek. xxxvi. 26; 2 Cor. v. 17.

2. *Convincing in its evidence.* Whenever a cure is effected there are visible proofs of such restoration; so in the case before us, when a sin-sick soul has made application to Jesus Christ in a scriptural manner, and has realized his saving efficacy, the effect is manifest; the faculties have received a new tone, and this renovation appears in holy tempers, spiritual conversation, and an upright, conscientious, line of conduct, Gal. v. 22—24; 2 Pet. i. 5—7.

3. *Happy in its influence.* Of this there cannot be a doubt entertained for a moment. Personally, the peace of God is enjoyed; divine support under affliction experienced; succor in the hour of temptation realized; and the joys of heaven anticipated. In the family the sacred scriptures are read; prayer regularly offered; diligence and economy promoted; and the salvation of dependants sought. In reference to the world, intercession is offered up, exhortation and reproof are administered; and religion recommended by pious example, Rom. v. 1; Josh. xxiv. 15; 1 Thess. ii. 10.

This subject tends, 1. To promote humility. 2. To produce self-examination. 3. To excite to fervent gratitude. 4. To encourage the desponding penitent.

GROWING IN GRACE.

2 Thessalonians i. 3.—We are bound to thank God always for you, brethren, as it is meet, because that your faith groweth exceedingly, and the charity of every one of you all towards each other aboundeth. (Pr.)

PERHAPS there is no christian society now on earth to whom this language is fully applicable; and it may be, if Paul had been writing to us, or to other christians of the present day, he would have adopted a different mode of address. It is nevertheless true, that among the primitive churches, they were not all alike prosperous, spiritual, and happy; but that at Thessalonica was one of the most amiable, and deserving of commendation. — It is a mercy however if these blessed fruits are found amongst us in any degree, and it is profitable for us to take the best examples presented in the scriptures, that we may learn our own defects, and be led to imitate what is more excellent.

1. Observe, in giving “thanks to God” for their growth in faith and love, the apostle plainly intimates that it was by *the grace of God* they were what they were. Though all that is evil in us belongs to ourselves, yet all that is good in us is of God alone, even that which is commanded and required at our hands.

2. The growth of faith and love plainly supposes that sanctification is *progressive*. It is like the kingdom of heaven in the world, which is compared to a grain of mustard seed, and a little leaven that leaveneth the whole lump. But if we had no inherent sanctification, and none but what is in Christ, this could not be true. Some indeed have endeavored to comfort themselves, and to comfort others, while in a low declining state, by certain examples in scripture; but it is our safest and best way to take examples of the most exalted kind.

3. The growth of faith is here connected with that of *brotherly love*, as a cause is connected with its effect. Certainly, if we grow in faith, we shall also grow in love; because the same principle which attaches us to the truth, will attach us to one another for the truth’s sake. Christ is the centre of union; all who love him are taught of God to love one another.

I. ATTEND TO SOME OF THE EVIDENCES OF THIS GROWTH IN GRACE, MENTIONED IN THE TEXT.

Growth in grace is here supposed to be *visible*, or the apostle could not have seen it. It becomes visible by the fruits of righteousness which it produces; and if this be true of us, others will perceive it. Acts iv. 13.

1. Growing in faith will be seen in our taking increasing pleasure *in the means of faith*, the word of God. — We shall find delight in reading and hearing it, and it will be to us the joy and rejoicing of our hearts. Psal. i. 2, 3; Prov. vi. 20—23. The word of Christ will dwell in us richly in all wisdom, and be received as the ingrafted word. Col. iii. 16. Seasons of public instruction will be attended with delight, and we shall not hear the word from custom, but from far higher motives. Isa. ii. 2.

2. It will appear in a growing attachment to *the doctrines of Christ*, who is himself the great object of faith. — If a man could speak with great eloquence, he might please a certain description of hearers; but if Christ be not his theme, he would fail to please those who believe in him, for to them he is precious. 1 Peter ii. 7. When therefore it is chiefly the manner, and not the subject of address that is regarded, it bespeaks a religion too much

like that of the Corinthians, and not that of the Thessalonians. 1 Cor. ii. 4, 5.

3. Growing in faith consists in an *increasing acquaintance* with the mind of God in his word, as the ground of faith. — We may be brought to believe the gospel in one day, but it is the work of a whole life to become rooted and grounded in the truth; to know not merely what we believe, but why; and to be able to say with Paul, "I know whom I have believed." We may believe what is true, from being told that it is so; but it will do us very little good, unless we perceive the authority on which it rests, and the principle by which it is supported in the scriptures of truth. Our faith must not stand in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God.

4. It will be evident by increasing *patience* and *submission*, under all the ills of life. — This was noticed in the Thessalonians, amidst the persecutions and tribulations which they endured, ver. 4. If we faint in the day of adversity our strength is small, and our faith is weak. Matt. xiv. 31.

5. By an increasing *weanedness from the present world*. — This is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith, both in prosperity and adversity. John also speaks of those as being strong, who have overcome the wicked one, and have the word of God abiding in them. 1 John ii. 14, v. 4.

5. Growing in faith appeared in the *love they had one to another* for the truth's sake. — Christians may live together without discredit, and esteem each other as friends; but to love as brethren, and as christians, is quite another thing. They may also love one another from being of the same mind, and yet not love on account of their being of the mind of Christ. — Or if there be true christian love existing, it may not "abound," as it did among the Thessalonians; yet this is necessary to prove that our faith "groweth exceedingly."

II. CONSIDER THE IMPORTANCE OF THE SUBJECT.

1. Growing in faith and love brings *glory to God*, verse 12. Bearing much fruit honors him, and recommends the gospel to others. John xv. 8.

2. It has an influence upon the *ministry of the word*, which is highly desirable. — It is next to impossible to preach to some people, who instead of growing in faith have no faith at all, and Paul himself found it so. Heb. v. 11. — But oh how different, where the souls of the people may be seen as it were in their countenances, and glisten in their eyes. Rom. i. 11, 12; Acts xi. 23.

3. If we do not make some progress in religion, we shall be *declining* and going backward. — There is no standing still in this race, no intermission in this warfare. If we grow not in faith and love, the seeds of indifference and unbelief will spring up and grow in their stead; will choke the word, and render it unfruitful.

4. If we do not grow in grace, our religion will at best become *doubtful*, and we shall have cause to tremble for the issue. Heb. x. 38. — It is the character of all true believers that they are making advancement in the divine life, and growing up in the image and likeness of God. Prov. iv. 18; 1 Pet. ii. 2; 2 Pet. i. 10, 11.

If there be some who have neither faith nor love, and are utterly unconcerned about it; what must be said to such? We must go on preaching the gospel, warning them to flee from the wrath to come, and leave the consequences.

CHRISTIAN PERFECTION AN OBJECT OF PRAYER AND OF HOPE.

Heb. xiii. 20, 21.—Now the God of peace, that brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great Shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of the everlasting covenant, make you perfect in every good work, to do his will; working in you that which is well-pleasing in his sight, through Jesus Christ. (Pr.)

The believing Hebrews were in a very unsettled state: many of them had gone back, and others were hesitating. Hence there were many practical disorders among them, and a general tendency to apostacy. Hence also the numerous warnings given them in various parts of this epistle: ch. ii. 3. iv. 1, 11. But after all this, the apostle closes his address with the prayer in the text, which is presented to God under the most endearing character.

This prayer is applicable to us as well as to them; for we also are the subjects of many defects, and need to offer up the same request.

I. CONSIDER THE BLESSINGS PRAYED FOR.

The apostle here gives us a picture of what christians should be, and should aspire after. Let us therefore pray—

1. That we may be “made perfect.”——The word means to set right, to restore and put in order, as in Gal. vi. 1: it therefore applies to the disorders among the Hebrews and other christians.——It does not so much express what we shall be hereafter, as what we may be in this world; and points out that lovely uniformity of character which accompanies great grace. If we examine ourselves, we shall find many things wanting, or so imperfect as to need much to be done for us, to make us what we should be.——Some appear to be pious and devout, but are deficient in benevolence; they abound in the duties of the first table of the law, but are deficient in the second.——Some have knowledge, but little zeal, and are cold hearted; while others abound in zeal, which is not according to knowledge.——Some are tender and affectionate, but wanting courage and fidelity.——To abound in all the fruits of the Spirit, so as to exhibit a lovely uniformity of character, is to be “made perfect;” and this is unspeakably desirable.

2. Perfect “in every good work.”——If we be christians, we are engaged in many good works: such as preaching, praying, hearing, reading, acts of kindness towards men, and of charity to the poor.——But there is a manner of doing these things which gives a sort of perfection to the christian character: if our minds are set in order, they will all be done in the spirit of the gospel, and in a manner very different from what they would otherwise be.——There is such a thing as speaking the word “as we ought to speak;” and of praying “as we ought.” Ephes. vi. 20. Rom. viii. 26; xii. 8.

3. Perfect in every good work “to do his will.”——We may be much occupied in religious concerns, and yet not do the will of God in them.——Sometimes for want of taking his word as our rule, we may go a round of religious duties, because others do the same, without any reference to the will of God.——Sometimes the motive may be deficient: we may do many things from nothing but mere vanity, self-righteousness, or a desire to be seen of men.——But if we are “made perfect,” we shall do the will of God from the heart.

4. We are taught to pray that the Holy Spirit may “work in us that which is well-pleasing in his sight.”——It is not in our corrupt nature to attain these things, without the influence of the Holy Spirit: it is he that excites desire in prayer, resolution in labor, and that makes us perfect in every good

word and work. — It is he that works faith in us by the promises, patience by sanctified affliction, and hope by the prospect of eternal life.

5. That all may be accepted "through Jesus Christ." — None are accepted but as believing in him; and no works of ours, but for his sake.

III. THE ENCOURAGEMENT WE HAVE TO PRAY FOR THESE BLESSINGS.

In offering up this prayer for the believing Hebrews, the apostle directed them and us to pray in the same manner, and from the same motives.

1. Great encouragement is derived from *the pacific character of God*, as "the God of peace." This view of the divine character is essential to our drawing near to him; and through a Mediator, there is now peace on earth, and good will towards men. — It is now with the world as it was with mankind after the deluge, when God accepted the sacrifice of Noah. Gen. viii. 20, 21.

2. From *the proofs* of his being the God of peace; "having brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus." — This is a doctrine of unspeakable importance, and supported by the clearest evidence. — 1. The resurrection of Christ is represented in the Scriptures as an act of almighty power, or as one of the greatest efforts of omnipotence. Ephes. i. 20. — 2. It is represented as a judicial release or discharge. Rom. iv. 25. — Sineon was kept as a hostage, having been surety for his brethren; but when they returned to Egypt, he was brought forth from prison, which was a sign of peace. God's having raised up Jesus from the dead, was declaring himself satisfied; it was smelling a sweet savor, as in Noah's offering. — Hence he was "raised for our justification," after being "delivered for our offences."

3. *The character in which Christ was raised up*; as "the great Shepherd of the sheep." He that raised the Shepherd from the grave, can raise us also from death, and gather together the scattered sheep. Ephes. i. 18. — It implies also that Christ has a people given him of the Father, and that for their salvation he went through all his sufferings: as such he died and rose again. — Paul was a shepherd, and did all he could, and there were other shepherds also; but Christ is the "great Shepherd" of the sheep; and God having brought them forth, it was in love to the flock.

4. *The ground of his resurrection is the sacrifice* he offered on the cross. — God's having raised him from the dead, was a proof of his having accepted the sacrifice in our stead; and this affords a powerful plea in prayer. — It is this which the ascended Saviour presents as the ground of his own intercession; and all our supplications must be founded on the same plea.

5. The blood which he shed, being "the blood of the everlasting covenant," affords additional encouragement in prayer. — This language may apply to the covenant made with Christ, as it is expressed in another passage, Zech. ix. 11: or to the covenant made with us through him, and which stands opposed to the covenant of works made at Sinai. — Covenants with sinful creatures have been made through the medium of sacrifices, and the covenant of grace is founded in the blood of the Mediator; and through it, it is that we have the cup of blessing.

THE OBJECTS, DESIGN, AND REQUISITION OF GOSPEL GRACE.

Acts xxvi. 17, 18.—I send thee, to open their eyes, and to turn them from darkness to light; and from the power of Satan unto God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins, and inheritance among them which are sanctified by faith that is in me. (Sk.)

1. THESE words occur in the relation given by the apostle Paul of his conversion to christianity; an event which was often referred to by himself, and has since been often appealed to by others, as a check to infidelity. It appears that the apostle's conversion was effected by means of our Lord's *personal* appearance to him. This personal appearance of Jesus, some considerable time after his death, proves the certainty of his *resurrection*; and his resurrection proves that he is the *Son of God*, the promised Saviour of the world, Rom. i. 4. Thus we have the fullest proof that christianity is of God, and that Paul was divinely commissioned to teach it.

2. The narrative of this remarkable conversion being so important, we cannot but feel well pleased with that repetition of it which we find in this book: especially as each account of it contains some interesting particular, not mentioned in the others. When St. Luke records this event in the 9th chapter, he informs us what the Lord said to Ananias, ver. 10—16; when St. Paul relates it himself in the 22d chapter, he informs us what Ananias said to him, ver. 12—14, and when he repeats it in this chapter, he informs us what our Lord said to him, ver. 15—18, "I am Jesus," &c. "I send thee to open their eyes," &c. These words teach us,

1. THE OBJECTS OF GOSPEL BENEVOLENCE,—or the persons to whom the gospel is sent. This we learn from the words which immediately precede our text, and from the text itself: here we are informed both who they are, and what they are.

1. *Who they are*;—They are the people, and the Gentiles. "Delivering thee," &c., ver. 17. By *the people* is meant the *Jewish nation*, who were God's chosen people, Deut. vii. 6;—a peculiarly favored people, Deut. xxxiii. 29;—and a sinful people, who became rebellious, ungrateful, and degenerated, Isa. i. 2—4. To this people the gospel was first preached by Christ's command, Luke xxiv. 47;—and to this people will the gospel yet be preached with the happiest success, Rom. xi. 25, 26. By *the Gentiles* are meant *those nations of the earth which are not of Jewish extraction*. To them also the Messiah was promised, Isa. xlix. 6; for their benefit he was manifested in the flesh, Luke ii. 10, 11, 32; to them also the gospel is sent by repeated injunctions, Luke xxiv. 47; Mark xvi. 15; Matt. xxviii. 19; on their receiving the gospel, Christ redeems them from sin, Acts x. 34, Rev. vii. 9, 10; and they are promised to Christ for his inheritance, Psal. ii. 8. The people and the Gentiles must therefore include *all mankind*; and hereby we are assured that God wills the salvation of all the human race, Ezek. xxxiii. 11; 1 Tim. ii. 4. Having seen who they are to whom the gospel is sent, let us now observe,

2. *What they are*,—or in what state the gospel finds them. *They are in darkness*; for the gospel is sent to open their eyes, &c. They are in the darkness of *ignorance*, respecting the nature, necessity, and way of salvation, Psal. cvii. 10, 11. They are in *darkness*; for they have closed their eyes by a deliberate rejection of divine light, John iii. 19, 20; Matt. xiii. 15; and they are blinded by Satan, 1 Cor. iv. 4. *They are subject to the power of Satan*. This they evidently are, being *inhabited* by him, Eph. ii. 2;—*devoted* to his service, John viii. 44;—and *governed* by his will, &c.

Tim. ii. 26. *They are condemned criminals*; under a sentence of eternal death, John. iii. 18; Ezek. xviii. 20. *They are a disinherited family*; for they have justly forfeited their title to heaven, Rom. iii. 23; and they have no well-grounded hope of it, Eph. ii. 12. Thus our state, through sin, is alarming; but God has remembered us in mercy, Psa. cxxxvi. 23. Of this our text also assures us, by teaching us,

II. THE DESIGN OF THE GOSPEL MISSION,—or the purposes for which it was sent.

1. *It is sent to open our eyes, and to turn us from darkness to light.*—*To open our eyes*; by calling our attention to the care of our souls, as the most important business of our lives, Matt. vi. 33; 1 Tim. iv. 8; Matt. xvi. 26. *To turn us from darkness to light*; by engaging us to come to Christ for illumination of mind, Eph. v. 14; Matt. xi. 29; John viii. 12.

2. *It is sent to turn us from the power of Satan unto God.* *To turn us from the power of Satan*; from his *dominion*, by subduing our evil habits, 2 Cor. x. 4, 5; and from his *service*, by effecting an entire reformation in our conduct, Tit. ii. 12. *To turn us unto God*; with humble *contrition*, Luke xv. 18; with earnest *cries* for mercy, Luke xviii. 13; with *affiance* in his compassion, Psa. xlii. 5, and lii. 8; and with due *subjection* to his authority, Rom. vi. 13.

3. *It is sent that we may receive forgiveness of sins.* Gospel forgiveness implies, full forgiveness of all our past sins, both secret and open, Acts xiii. 38, 39. *Affectionate* forgiveness; such as exempts us from the punishment due to sin, and interests us in God's paternal favor, Psa. xxxii. 1, 2; Luke xv. 22—24. *Assured* forgiveness, which is attested by the Holy Spirit, Isa. xii. 1; Rom. viii. 16.

4. *It is sent that we may receive inheritance among them which are sanctified.* *To be sanctified*, is to be *separated from sin*; and *devoted to God's service*, Rom. vi. 22. This sanctification the gospel *requires*, 1 Thess. v. 23, 24, and iv. 7; and what the gospel requires, it instrumentally *produces*, Obad. 17; John xvii. 17. The *inheritance* of those which are *sanctified*, is *two-fold*; a gracious inheritance in this life, 1 Cor. iii. 21—23; and a glorious inheritance in heaven, 1 Peter i. 3—5. And *all who obey the gospel enjoy this inheritance*, Psa. lxxxiv. 11; Acts xx. 32. That we may ensure the enjoyment of this inheritance, our text teaches us,

III. THE DUTY OF GOSPEL SUBJECTS;—or the means by which its blessings are appropriated. All its benefits are obtained by faith in Christ; "By faith that is in me." Here observe,

1. *What faith in Christ implies.* It appears from God's word that it implies—*Coming to Christ*, for rest from sin and its consequences, Matt. xi. 28; John v. 35. *Receiving Christ*, as our Teacher, Sovereign, and Redeemer, John i. 12; Matt. xi. 29. *Trusting in Christ*, for full salvation, pardon, acceptance, holiness, and heaven, Isa. xxviii. 16; Eph. i. 13. *Abiding in Christ*, till he comes to glorify us, 1 John ii. 28; Heb. xii. 2. And *walking in Christ*, by seeking all he calls us to enjoy, Col. ii. 6; Phil. iii. 12.

2. *The propriety of requiring faith in Christ as the means of salvation.* This is evident, because faith in Christ tends to inspire its subjects with the most profound *reverence for God*, who will not be approached by us without a Mediator, Psa. lxxxix. 7; Heb. xii. 28, 29; with *dread of sin*, which rendered Christ's sufferings necessary, that we might be saved consistently with God's rectitude, Heb. ii. 10; Rom. iii. 25, 26; with *confidence in God*; who has graciously given us the earnest of salvation, in the gift of

his Son, Rom. viii. 32; with *gratitude* to God, for his redeeming goodness, 2 Cor. v. 14, 15; 1 Cor. vi. 19, 20; Rom. xii. 1; and with deep *humiliation*, through a consciousness that our salvation is ascribable only to divine grace, Eph. ii. 8, 9; Tit. iii. 5—7.

APPLICATION.

1. *From the duty of gospel subjects, learn the importance of faith in our Lord Jesus Christ.*—It is important, as none can be saved without it, John iii. 36; Mark xvi. 15, 16. Hence, *seek salvation in no other way* but that of faith in Christ; not on the ground of mere mercy without a Mediator; for God will not admit sinners into his presence on these terms, John xiv. 6; not on account of your sufferings, for these being the effects of sin, can never remove their cause; not on account of your good morals, for you cannot atone for past offences by the imperfect fulfilment of present duties, Psalm cxliii. 2. *Rest in nothing short of faith in Christ.* Not in partial reformation, nor in correct opinions, nor in the mere outward form of godliness. Now actually come to Christ, receive him, and trust in him, Acts xxii. 16. *Persevere in the exercise of faith*; its continuance is necessary, Heb. x. 37.

2. *From the design of the gospel mission, learn your privileges as believers in Christ.* Consider the blessings you are called to enjoy; these are illumination, conversion, pardon, sanctification. *Examine yourselves*; are you thus turned from darkness to light; from the power of Satan unto God? have you received forgiveness of sins? are you sanctified,—redeemed from sin, and devoted to God? have you heaven in prospect? can you say with the apostle, 2 Cor. v. 1; 1 Peter i. 3. *Expect* those blessings, if exercising faith in Christ; they are purchased for you, promised to you, and are now ready to be imparted, John xi. 40; Luke xiv. 17.

3. *From the objects of gospel benevolence, learn your duty as the followers of Christ.* As his professing followers you are called to *imitate him*, Phil. ii. 5; 1 John ii. 6. Like him, have *compassion* on perishing sinners; whether relatives, the rising generation, adult neighbors, or the heathen world. However distinguished, their case is truly pitiable; for they are blind, enslaved, perishing, helpless, and hopeless, Job vi. 14. *Impart gospel truth to them*, that they may be healed of their diseases, and saved from their destructions, Psa. cvii. 20. *Your consistent christian zeal will be attended with the happiest results.* Hereby you will concur with God in fulfilling the Messiah's request, Psa. ii. 8; you will promote the glory of God, Isa. lxi. 1—3; and you ensure eternal honor to yourselves, Daniel xii. 3; 1 Peter v. 3.

 THE NATURE AND EFFECTS OF TRUE RELIGION.

James iii. 17.—The wisdom that is from above, is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, and easy to be entreated, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality, and without hypocrisy. (H. H.)

RELIGION, like a tree, must be judged of by its fruits—

That which savors of pride, earthliness, or sensuality, is not of God—

Its character is justly drawn in the words before us—It is,

I. HOLY IN ITS NATURE—

Religion, above all other things, is entitled to the name of “wisdom”—

It enlightens the mind, informs the judgment, regulates the life—

And he who lives under its influence, is wise in the estimation of God himself—

Being from above, it resembles its divine author—

Religion is a beam issuing from God the fountain of light—

And, as “in him is no darkness at all,” so neither is there any thing impure in that which flows from him—

It may be mixed with sin, but in its own nature it is “pure”—

And, in proportion as it prevails, it will dissipate the clouds of ignorance and sin—

All “spiritual or fleshly filthiness” will surely vanish before it, Matt. v. 8 Acts xv. 9; 2 Cor vii. 1.

In consequence of this it is,

II. USEFUL IN ITS TENDENCY—It renders us,**1. Amiable in our spirit—**

Though men differ widely in their natural tempers, yet the unregenerate are, on many occasions, quarrelsome, fierce, implacable—

But as soon as ever religion exerts its influence on our minds, we mortify these unhallowed tempers, and become “peaceable, gentle, and easy to be entreated”—

From thenceforth it is the delight of our souls to cultivate and promote peace, to maintain in ourselves a meek and quiet spirit, and to exercise, as occasion may require, forbearance and forgiveness to all around us—

2. Benevolent in our conduct—

Compassion and diligence are inseparable attributes of true religion—

The real christian is not, like the barren fig-tree, covered with the leaves of an outward profession, but destitute of fruit—

He labors to abound in every good word and work, and to benefit to the utmost the bodies and souls of his fellow creatures—

His heart is “full” of love, and out of the abundance of his heart he both speaks and acts—

It is within us a living principle, that is,

III. UNIFORM IN ITS OPERATIONS—It extends,**1. To duties without limitation—**

The grace of God will not admit of “partiality” in our obedience—

It will stimulate us to difficult and self-denying duties, as well as to those which are more easy and pleasant, 1 Tim. v. 21.

And will make us as solicitous to do what is right towards strangers or enemies, as towards our own friends or partizans, 1 Tim. v. 21.

2. To desires without reserve—

Religion penetrates to the inmost soul, and regulates all our motives and principles of action—

The person whose *outward* conduct *only* is good, is in God’s sight no other than a “whited sepulchre”—

The man whose heart is right with God, will watch against all selfish ends, and endeavor to act with a single eye to the glory of his God—

INFER,**1. How unjustly is religion condemned in the world!**

Many consider religion as destructive of all personal and social happiness—

But what is there in this representation of religion that deserves such a character?—

Let the world call it *folly* if they will; but God accounts it "*wisdom*"—

2. What reason have the most godly to blush and be ashamed!

We must not estimate our religion by our opinions so much as by our practice—

Doubtless we must build on Christ as our only foundation; but we have no evidence of an union with him any further than we raise upon him this holy superstructure—

Alas! what poor builders have the very best of us been; and how little progress have we made when we judge by this test!—

3. What need have we to wait continually upon our God in prayer!

This wisdom is "from above," and can be derived from God alone—

And how can we obtain it of him, but in the exercise of prayer?—

Let us then ask it of him, who has promised to impart it "liberally, and without upbraiding," James i. 5.

STABILITY THE GIFT OF GOD.

Psa. lvi. 8, 9.—O bless our God, ye people, and make the voice of his praise to be heard; which holdeth our soul in life, and suffereth not our feet to be moved. (H. H.)

THE blessings of Providence, when uninterruptedly continued; are scarcely noticed: it is only when the loss of them has been painfully apprehended, or actually sustained, that we consider how much we were indebted to God for them. What were the particular trials that had been endured by David or the Jewish nation, we cannot precisely determine: but it is evident, that the deliverance vouchsafed to them had made a lively impression on the Psalmist's mind. Compare ver. 1, 2, with ver. 10—12. The words of our text would furnish exceedingly profitable meditations, if we confined them to their primary import; since the preservation of our life and health, amidst the many seen and unseen dangers with which we are surrounded, demands our most grateful acknowledgments. But a subsequent part of the psalm shews clearly that the writer had respect also to spiritual blessings; ver. 16; and therefore we shall draw your attention more especially to them; and shew,

I. WHAT A MERCY IT IS TO BE UPHELD IN THE WAYS OF GOD.

We feel somewhat of the obligation conferred upon us in our first awakening and conversion; but are by no means duly sensible how much we owe to our God for our daily preservation. But we shall learn better to appreciate this mercy if we consider,

1. To how many snares and dangers we are exposed!

We have frequent occasion to advert to the temptations with which we are encompassed in the world; and to notice the still greater dangers we experience from the corruptions of our own hearts; and the additional conflicts which we have to sustain with all the powers of darkness. We dwell not therefore so particularly on those things at this time; but rather mention the danger to which we are exposed even from lawful things. It is not only allowable, but highly proper, to prosecute our worldly callings with diligence; and to cultivate the tenderest regard for our wife or children: yet both the one and the other may engross too much of our hearts, and become hindrances to us in our journey towards heaven. Our food, our sleep, our studies;

our recreations, may become snares, if we be not continually on our guard. It is therefore an unspeakable mercy to be upheld in the midst of such manifold temptations.

2. How many in like circumstances with ourselves, have fallen—

We are living in the full enjoyment of divine ordinances, and of whatever can conduce to the welfare of our souls. But are we therefore secure? Look back to the apostolic age: see how many then were seduced by error, Tit. i. 11; 2 Tim. ii. 18; or disheartened by the fear of man, 2 Tim. i. 15, and iv. 16; Matt. xxvi. 73, 74; or turned aside by the love of this world, Matt. xiii. 22; 2 Tim. iv. 10; or overthrown by unbridled passions. 1 Tim. v. 11, 12; 2 Sam. xi. 4. What reason then have we to adore the grace that has preserved *us*!

3. What would be the probable consequence of our falling—

Some who have fallen have been restored speedily; John xxi. 15—17; and some after a lapse of time; 2 Sam. xii. 13; but thousands have fallen to rise no more. The progress of declension is for the most part rapid. The heart becomes averse to holy duties: from secret neglects proceeds a backwardness to social conference and public ordinances. The conscience is gradually weakened, till it ceases to perform its office, or speaks in so faint a voice, that it is scarcely heard. The besetting sin then gains an entire ascendant, and leads him captive; till at last, God, filled with indignation against the base apostate, “gives him up to a reprobate mind,” Ps. lxxxix. 11, 12; and either cuts him off by a sudden stroke, Prov. xxix. i; Acts v. 5, 10, or leaves him to protract a miserable existence, merely that he may bear testimony against his own impieties, and proclaim to those around him the foretastes which he already feels of his eternal destiny. Eccl. v. 17; with Prov. xiv. 32.

Such examples we have seen*: what a mercy it is that we ourselves, instead of being warned by others, are not made a warning to others!

4. What occasion we have given to God to let us fall—

Let us call to mind our own backslidings; our secret neglects; our tampering with temptations; our indulgence of evil passions; our vain-confident presumption: is it not wonderful that God has not long since said respecting us, “Let him alone;” Hos. iv. 17; “My Spirit shall strive with him no longer.” Gen. vi. 3: “He likes not to retain God in his knowledge; so I will give him up!” Rom. i. 28.

If we be convinced of these things, let us proceed to consider,

II. THE DUTY OF THOSE WHO EXPERIENCE THIS MERCY—

There can be no doubt on this subject. If our souls have been upheld in life, we should,

1. Acknowledge God in our steadfastness—

“Who is it that has made us to differ” from others? 1 Cor. iv. 7. Have we by nature any more strength than they? or have we of ourselves a more abundant measure of goodness? No: it is “by the grace of God we are what we are;” 1 Cor. xv. 10; we have been as much indebted to his protecting hand, as a new-born infant is to its mother’s care. We should then acknowledge, that “of him our fruit is found;” Hos. xiv. 8; Isai. xxvi. 12; that “it is he that hath wrought us to the self-same thing;” 2 Cor. v. 5; and that to him belongs all the glory of our stability. Ps. lxvii. 8; and xxvi. 12.

* This was preached on occasion of a person that had made a profession of religion, going back to drunkenness, and dying in a drunken fit. See other examples, 1 Cor. x. 6—11.

2. Bless and adore him for his great goodness—

It is not by cold acknowledgments merely that we are to requite the Lord, but by fervent and devout thanksgivings. It is not possible for language adequately to express the obligations we owe to him: and therefore we should call upon "all that is within us to bless his holy name."

Nor should we be content with doing this ourselves: we should invite the whole creation, as it were, to join us. We should labor to stimulate all to love and serve him; and to make his name known to the very ends of the earth. Isai. xii. 4—6, or xlii. 10—12. See also *the text*.

It is in this way that we should endeavor at least, as much as in us lies, to "render unto the Lord according to the benefits" he has conferred upon us.

3. Walk humbly and carefully before him—

We must not presume upon the kindness of our God, or imagine that, because we have been upheld hitherto, we are in no danger of falling: if we had attained the stability of St. Paul himself, "we must keep our body under, and bring it into subjection, lest we become cast-aways ourselves." 1 Cor. ix. 27. To neglect this were to tempt God. God has warned us plainly, that "he will be with us no longer than we continue with him; that if we forsake him, he will forsake us." 2 Chron. xv. 2. We therefore must not be high-minded, but fear; 1 Cor. x. 12; and take heed lest we fall; Rom. xi. 20; and "watch and pray lest we enter into temptation." Matt. xxvi. 41. If we would have our God to keep us, we must be careful to "keep ourselves." Ver. 18, with Jude 20, 21. We must look at the fearful examples that are before our eyes; Luke xvii. 32; Heb. iv. 11; and tremble lest we ourselves become similar monuments of instability, and of God's deserved wrath.

4. Commit ourselves continually to him—

God has engaged to "keep the feet of his saints;" 1 Sam. ii. 9; and directed us to commit ourselves to him for that purpose; 1 Pet. iv. 19; and assured us, that, if we do so, "he will establish our goings." 2 Chron. xx. 20. We should commend ourselves therefore to his gracious care and protection. We should say with David, "Hold thou up my goings in thy paths, that my footsteps slip not: Ps. xvii. 5: "Hold thou me up, and I shall be safe." Ps. cxix. 117. To this we are encouraged by our past experience of his mercy: we may from the kindness already shewn us, safely infer the continuance of it to our souls. Ps. lvi. 13. If we can say, "He hath delivered," we may properly add, "In whom we trust that he will yet deliver us." 2 Cor. i. 10.

But here arise two important QUESTIONS, which it is of the utmost importance to resolve:

1. Are our souls really alive to God?

In vain shall we speak of having "our souls upheld in life," if they have never yet been quickened from the dead. Let us then seriously, and as in the presence of God, inquire, Whether we have been made partakers of a new and living principle, whereby we have been enabled to die unto sin, and to live unto God? Let us not mistake a mere approbation of religion for real regeneration: we must have become new creatures, having new views, new pursuits, new desires, and new prospects, if we have been truly born again: 2 Cor. v. 17; and if this change have not been wrought within us, we are yet in our natural and unconverted state; we may have "a name to live, but are really dead" before God: notwithstanding we may have been preserved from any flagrant violation of our duty, we are yet "dead in trespasses and sins."

2. Supposing that we are on the whole alive to God, have "our feet really been kept from falling?"

We must ascertain this fact, before we can cordially thank God for it. And is it indeed true of all who profess religion amongst us, that they have been kept? Have none of us acted unworthy of our high calling? Has there been nothing in our tempers, nothing in our worldly transactions, inconsistent with our profession? Or, supposing our outward conduct to have been unimpeachable, have there been no secret sins, which we have reason to mourn over; nothing for which we ought to blush and be confounded before God? Perhaps, if we look inward, we shall find more occasion to bewail our falls, than to bless our God for having kept us from falling.

But, if conscience testify that we have indeed walked uprightly before God, then let us imitate the example in the text, and not only bless and magnify him ourselves, but endeavor also to "make the voice of his praise to be heard" throughout the world.

STEADFASTNESS IN GOD.

Phil. iv. 1.—My brethren, dearly beloved and longed for, my joy and crown, so stand fast in the Lord, my dearly beloved. (H. H.)

ST. PAUL was a man of feeling, a man of love. He felt for all: for those whom he saw perishing in sin, he would willingly have endured all that men or devils could inflict, if only it might be instrumental to their salvation. Rom. ix. 3. For those who belonged to Christ, even though they had never seen his face in the flesh, he had great conflicts, striving if by any means he might promote their eternal welfare. But towards those who had been converted by his ministry, he felt as a father towards his children: he could say, "God is my record how greatly I long after you all in the bowels of Jesus Christ." Phil. i. 8. To such is this epistle addressed; as indeed the words of our text clearly evince. Such an accumulation of tender expressions can scarcely be found in the same space in all the Book of God. But what is the drift of them all? Why does he so labor to convince the Philipians of his love, and to conciliate their regards to him? it was, that they might be stirred up to give the more earnest heed to his exhortations, and to "stand fast in the Lord."

To be "in the Lord" is the character of every believer: he is united unto Christ by faith, and is engrafted into him as a branch of the living vine. But our blessed Lord cautions us again and again to "abide in him," and warns us against the danger of separation from him. John xv. 1—6. In like manner we are frequently exhorted to "stand fast in the Lord;" and so to continue in the faith grounded and settled, that we may not be moved away from the hope of the gospel."

To you then we would now address the exhortation, and say, Stand fast in,
I. YOUR ALLEGIANCE TO HIM—

Many things will conspire to draw you away from Christ—

The world, with its vanities on the one hand, and its terrors on the other, will assault you continually— —the flesh also will operate to bring you

into subjection to all its basest lusts— — —Nor will Satan be idle: he, with all his confederate hosts, will strive, by innumerable wiles and temptations, either to subvert your principles, or to vitiate your practice— — —It is a warfare into which you are brought, when once you enlist under the banners of Christ; and you must expect all manner of conflicts to your dying hour.

But you must be steadfast in your adherence to him—

You must be "good soldiers of Jesus Christ," and never cease to fight till you have obtained the victory. Neither hopes nor fears, neither joys nor sorrows, must be suffered to alienate you from him, or to damp your zeal in his service. True it is that the Lord gives you many great and precious promises, that he will keep you, and that nothing shall ever separate you from his love. Rom. viii. 35—39. But this is not to encourage supineness; but rather to make you more earnest in your application to him for protection and support. With the example of Demas before you, you should never cease to fear, lest you also should "fall from your own steadfastness," 2 Pet. iii. 17, and "be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ." 2 Cor. xi. 3. Aware of your danger, you must "fight the good fight of faith," and "cleave unto the Lord with full purpose of heart." "You must be faithful unto death, if ever you would obtain the crown of life."

Stand fast also in,

II. YOUR DEPENDENCE ON HIM—

From this also you are in danger of being drawn—

There is in us a continual proneness to self-confidence and self-dependence. We are ever ready to lean to our own understanding to guide us— — —our own righteousness to justify us— — —our own strength to preserve us— — —It is a great matter to have the soul brought to a simple reliance upon the Lord Jesus Christ for every thing.

But we must live altogether by faith on Christ—

He is "Head over all things to his church," and has all fulness of blessings treasured up in him for our use. Eph. i. 22, 23; Col. i. 19. "He is made of God unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption;" and from him must we receive them all, John i. 16, that in, and by, and for all, His name may be glorified— — —Isa. xlv. 24, 25.

Nor must any thing be suffered to weaken,

III. YOUR EXPECTATION OF HIS FUTURE ADVENT—

To that day there is a particular reference in the preceding context—Ch iii. 20, 21.

We are apt to lose sight of that awful day—

This is evident, from the remissness and negligence with which the things of eternity are pursued. Could we be dull and slothful with that day before our eyes? — — —Could the allurements or terrors of the world have any influence upon our hearts, if we knew and saw that the Judge was at the door? — — —

But we must stand continually in a state of preparation for it—

To wait for Christ's second coming is the habit of mind to which every believer is brought: 1 Thess. i. 9, 10; and in proportion as it is formed in the mind, is the progress which we have made in the divine life. 1 Cor. i. 7. We should not give way to sloth, like the foolish Virgins; but have "our loins girt, and our lamps trimmed, and ourselves as those who wait for the coming of their Lord." We should look forward with a holy longing for that day, as the termination of all our conflicts, and the consummation of

all our joys, Tit. ii. 13; 2 Pet. iii. 12,— — —and comfort ourselves with the assured expectation that then we shall be ever with the Lord. 1 Thess. iv. 17, 18. With that period before our eyes, we shall “be diligent to be found of him in peace, without spot and blameless.” 2 Pet. iii. 14.

Permit me, in CONCLUSION, to urge this matter, after the example of the apostle in my text.

JOYFUL IMPORT OF THE GOSPEL.

Acts viii. 8.—And there was great joy in that city. (Pr.)

THE christian church has from its infancy been subject to great vicissitudes, and like the moon it has continually waxed and waned. When the disciples first found the Messiah they were full of joy; when he was crucified they were covered with a cloud of darkness; but when he arose from the dead their hopes and joys revived again. The work of grace at Jerusalem, in the conversion of so many thousands, makes them a little heaven upon earth; but soon a storm of persecution followed. See the blessed Stephen stoned to death, and Saul making havoc of the church, verse 2. Yet out of all this evil much good arises, and now there is another triumph to the cause of truth and righteousness. “Philip went down to Samaria and preached Christ unto them—and there was great joy in that city.”

I. IT IS DESERVING OF REMARK, THAT THE SEAT OF THIS HOLY TRIUMPH WAS “THE CITY OF SAMARIA.”

Well may it be said, “the wilderness and the solitary place shall be glad for them, and the desert shall rejoice, and blossom like the rose;” for such indeed was the city of Samaria.

1. Its inhabitants consisted partly of *heathens* and partly of *apostate Jews*, who had a sort of half heathenised religion among them. They had been a superstitious and degenerate people from the time of Salmanezer, and such they still continued. 2 Kings xvii. 33, 34. — They set up a temple on mount Gerizzim in opposition to that on mount Moriah, and carried on a kind of worship which Christ condemned. John iv. 22. — They had also manifested the greatest aversion to the Jews, and to Christ and his followers as being of that nation. Luke ix. 51—53. A hopeless and inveterate people!

2. Yet this very city is celebrated for its *reception of the gospel*, and was one of the first to surrender to the arms of truth. — On the report of the woman, after the interview at Jacob’s well, the Samaritans showed a disposition to listen to the gospel, and they received the Saviour very courteously. John iv. 39—42. And now when Philip went down and preached Christ to them, “the people with one accord gave heed unto those things which Philip spake, hearing and seeing the miracles which he did,” ver. 6. — Thus was fulfilled the prediction of our Lord to the woman of Samaria, and also to his disciples. John iv. 23, 35. Thus also the Lord builds up Jerusalem, and gathers together the outcasts of Israel. Isa. cxlvii. 2. Isa. lvi. 6—8.

II. THE JOY WHICH NOW PREVAILED IN THE CITY OF SAMARIA IS FULLY ACCOUNTED FOR BY THE CAUSE WHICH PRODUCED IT

Joy is never excited but on some great occasion, and the seasons of religious joy are distinguished by some interesting or extraordinary occurrence. Such was the joy and gladness at the preparation for building the temple of Jerusalem, 1 Chron. xxix. 9: at Hezekiah's passover, 2 Chron. xxx. 25, 26: at the rebuilding and dedication of the city wall, Neh. xii. 43; at the birth of Christ, Luke ii. 10—14; at the appearance of the star to the eastern magi, Matt. ii. 13; and at the ascension of our blessed Saviour, Luke xxiv. 52. All these were great events, and furnished an abundant source of joy and rejoicing.

We may therefore expect something great and interesting in the present instance, to fill a whole city with joy — and what was it? Answer, the glad tidings of the gospel: that Christ was come, that he died for sinners, that he had risen again, that he had ascended above all heavens, and lived to make intercession for transgressors; that through faith in him there was now forgiveness and acceptance with God, and this news was proclaimed to all nations.

Some may say that these are common things, and they have been proclaimed in other cities as well as in Samaria, and we have all heard of them before. — Be it so: if you have cordially received them, there is enough to occasion great joy; and if they have not produced such an effect, it is because they have not been fully realized by faith.

Let us then recapitulate the leading facts of the gospel, and observe the glad tidings contained in them—

1. Is it not ground for joy that *the Lord is come into the world to save sinners?* — This is what the church was looking for, nearly four thousand years. This was the great theme of prophetic inspiration, from age to age; and what Israel was commanded to rejoice in, even from the days of old. Zech. ix. 9. The prospect of our Saviour's advent inspired not only the ancient church, but even the whole creation with joy and gladness. Psal. xvi. 11—13. — If therefore Samaria had not exulted in this great event, there would have been no sympathy, no correspondence with the ancient believers, and of course no evidence of their belief in its existence or reality. — If we also profess to believe in the coming of Christ, and the great objects of his appearance, and are still indifferent and unaffected, it proves our faith to be utterly vain. Shall glory to God in the highest, peace on earth, and good will to men be nothing to us; and yet shall we be allowed to call ourselves christians!

2. Is it not ground for joy that *Christ has laid down his life for us*, and redeemed us unto God by his blood? — It is true his death caused sorrow to the disciples for a time; but when they understood the design of that great event, their sorrow was turned into joy. — Consider in what light this interesting truth is held up to us in the scriptures. "But now in the end of the world hath he appeared, to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself—When he had by himself purged our sins, he sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high." Heb. ix. 26, i. 3. On this inestimable sacrifice is founded a new and everlasting covenant, promising forgiveness, and securing eternal life to all that believe. Heb. viii. 10—12; 2 Cor. v. 18, 19; John iii. 16. — This is the source of the first hope and joy to an awakened sinner, and it has turned the sorrow of many into gladness. We may afterwards derive comfort from a consciousness of believing in Christ, and being interested in him; but the first is from looking to him, looking out of ourselves, and beholding the Lamb of God that taketh away the sin of the world.

3. Is it not a matter of great joy that *Christ is risen from the dead?*—This proves that he was the true Messiah, that his sacrifice is accepted, and that justice is fully satisfied. “The God of peace brought again from the dead that great Shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of the everlasting covenant—and raised him up and gave him glory, that your faith and hope might be in God.” Heb. xiii. 20; 1 Pet. i. 21. — The resurrection of Christ is also the pattern and the pledge of our own resurrection, and is therefore on this account a matter of joyful exultation. 1 Cor. xv. 20; Phil. iii. 21.

4. Is it not matter of joy too, that *Christ has ascended into glory*: and that he ever liveth to make intercession for us? — On this ground it is that he is able to save to the uttermost all that come unto God by him. Heb. vii. 25. If any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father. 1 John ii. 1. — Having entered into his glory, he is become heir of all things, and possesses the power of enriching his church, and of ruling in the midst of his enemies. Psal. lxxviii. 18; ex. 1, 2; Ephes. i. 20—22.

5. That through faith in his name there is *forgiveness of sin, and acceptance with God?* — The import of the gospel is, Believe in Jesus, and ye shall be saved; submit to his righteousness, and ye shall be accepted, whatever be your past sins, or present unworthiness. Look off from all duties of your own, and plead that obedience with which God is well pleased. Come unto me, says Jesus, and ye shall find rest to your souls—and him that cometh I will in no wise cast out. John vi. 37. — If such tidings do not gladden the heart, it is only because we have neither part nor lot in the matter.

6. Is it not a source of joy that this gospel *is now sent to all nations?* — Salvation originated with the Jews; theirs were the covenants, and the giving of the law; and of whom, as concerning the flesh, Christ came. But the Gentiles were to be grafted in, and to partake of the root and fatness of the olive tree; and now there is a community of privileges and of blessedness.

7. Was it not a special matter of joy to the Samaritans, that *they themselves had believed the gospel?* — If Israel of old rejoiced that they were willing to build the house of the Lord, much more may we rejoice to see the spiritual temple edified and built up, especially if our hands also are in the work. — Philip the evangelist rejoiced in the success of his labor, the Samaritans rejoiced in the doctrines of the cross, and that the kingdom of God was come nigh unto them.

REFLECTIONS.

1. If then the gospel bring tidings of great joy, why is it reproached as tending to gloom and melancholy? Can any thing be more unreasonable or unjust.

2. Why do individuals despond, while there is such an exhibition of mercy? Because they do not hearken to the gospel, nor receive the record which God hath given of his Son.

3. Why do not christians possess more joy and peace in believing? Because we have not more religion, do not live more under the influence of the gospel. Lord increase our faith.

THE SUBJECTS OF DIVINE GRACE EXHORTED TO CLEAVE UNTO THE LORD.

Acts xi. 23. Who, when he came, and had seen the grace of God, was glad, and exhorted them all, that with purpose of heart they would cleave unto the Lord." (Sk.)

THESE words are evidently connected with the preceding verses, and the whole paragraph from, ver. 19, claims our serious attention;—"Now they which were scattered abroad," &c. In this relation we observe,

1. *A display of God's perfections in the extension of his kingdom*, ver. 19—21. Of his *truth*; in protecting his church amidst cruel persecution, Matt. xvi. 18:—his *goodness*; in sending the gospel to both Jews and Gentiles, Psa. cvii. 20, 21:—his *wisdom*; in promoting his own glory by the malice of his enemies, Psa. lxxv. 10:—his *power*, in giving abundant success to the labors of his servants.

2. This account teaches us *the true nature of a christian church*, ver. 22.—The church is capable of *hearing* and *acting*; for the church heard that some of the Gentiles were converted to the faith of Christ, and sent Barnabas to visit them, and confirm them in the faith. Therefore the church cannot mean a building set apart for divine worship, as some suppose; but a company of professing Christians united to assist each other in seeking the power of godliness, Acts ix. 31, and xii. 5. As a missionary of the church, Barnabas came to Antioch; "Who when he came, and had seen the grace of God," &c. By what Barnabas thus saw, and felt, and did, we are instructed to observe,

I. THAT THE CONVERSION OF SINNERS TO GOD, IS JUSTLY ASCRIBABLE TO HIS GRACE. This is evident from the subjects, the benefits, and the causes of conversion.

1. *The subjects of conversion are sinners*—who have rebelled against God, Isa. i. 2, 3,—who have cherished and manifested *enmity* of heart against God, Rom. viii. 7; Col. i. 21; and who have justly *forfeited* every favor at God's hand, Lam. iii. 22.

2. *The benefits of conversion are various*. Conversion is a *turning* to God, and implies both a *deliverance* and a *translation*, Col. i. 13.—*A deliverance from Satan*; from his service and dominion, Rom. vi. 14, 22.—*And a translation into the kingdom of Christ*; by the enjoyment of pardon, which entitles them to the kingdom of heaven, Col. i. 14; Tit. iii. 6;—and of purity, which fits them for the kingdom of heaven, Col. i. 12.

3. *The causes of conversion are meritorious, efficient, and instrumental*.—The *meritorious* cause is *Christ's mediation*, through which we are pardoned, Eph. iv. 32.—The *efficient* cause is the *Holy Spirit*, 1 Cor. vi. 11, which is God's free gift, Luke xi. 13.—The *instrumental* cause is *faith*, Acts xxvi. 18, which ascribes all it receives to the grace or favor of God, Eph. ii. 8; Tit. iii. 4, 5; 1 Cor. xv. 10. Our text teaches us,

II. THAT WHERE THE GRACE OF GOD IS ENJOYED, IT WILL BE SEEN IN ITS EFFECTS;—"When he came, he *saw* the grace of God." The grace of God may be, and is seen,

1. *In the tempers of its subjects, or the dispositions of their minds*. Where grace reigns, pride, and unkindness, and unmercifulness, will be subdued, Col. iii. 12—14.

2. *In the conversation of its subjects*; this is pure, and profitable, Eph. iv. 22; Col. iii. 16, 17.

3. *In the actions of its subjects*; these are godly, righteous, and temperate, Tit. ii. 12.

4. *All who profess to enjoy the grace of God, should be careful thus to show it.*—On principles of *prudence*; that their own eternal salvation may be secured, 2 Pet. i. 5—10.—On principles of *piety*; that God may hereby be glorified, Matt. v. 16; 1 Pet. xi. 11, 12.—On principles of *benevolence*; that their weak brethren may be strengthened, Heb. xiii. 13, and that their pastors may hereby be comforted, 1 Thess. iii. 8; 3 John, ver. 4.—As an excitement to holy diligence, on this generous principle, our text teaches us,

III. THAT WHEN THE GRACE OF GOD IS SEEN, IT AFFORDS PLEASURE TO WELL-DISPOSED MINDS;—"When he saw the grace of God, he was *glad*;" and his joy was both pious and pure.

1. *His joy on this occasion was pious.* It was the joy of a saint excited by seeing the grace of God manifested, and sinners saved. He was glad—As "*a good man*," or *a lover of mankind*; because hereby many were benefited; being raised to a state of safety, happiness, and honor, Rom. v. 1; Eph. ii. 1—6; and the welfare of the civil state was also promoted, Prov. xiv. 32. He was glad—As *a holy man*; for he was "*full of the Holy Ghost*." Hence he was glad, because the felicity of angels was hereby augmented, Luke xv. 10. Christ was hereby most pleasingly satisfied, Isa. liii. 10, 11; and God was hereby glorified, Isa. lxi. 1—3. He was glad—As *a faithful man*; for he "*was full of faith*." Hence, he confidently expected the fulfilment of God's word, Ps. ii. 8. He beheld in these converted Gentiles, the earnest of Christ's universal dominion; and could exclaim with David, Ps. lxxii. 19, 20.

2. *His joy on this occasion was pure.* He was glad—though the subjects of this grace were *Gentile strangers*; it was not the joy of *bigotry*: and though he was not the *instrument* of their conversion; it was not the joy of *self-complacency*.

3. *His joy on this occasion was exemplary*; worthy of our imitation. Wherever the grace of God is seen we should rejoice: without *bigotry*, this is *unchristian*, Eph. v. 24; and without *envy*, for this is *devilish*, James iii. 14—16. Our text teaches us,

IV. THAT CLEAVING UNTO THE LORD IS THE INDISPENSABLE DUTY OF ALL CHRISTIAN CONVERTS.

1. *By the Lord is meant our Lord Jesus Christ*; who is our *Guide*, Ps. xlviii. 14,—our *Sovereign*, Matt. xxiii. 8;—our *Strength*, Ps. xlv. 1;—and our *Foundation*, Isa. xxviii. 16.

2. *It is the duty of Christian converts to cleave unto the Lord.* Cleave unto him—By habitual *attention*, Acts iii. 22, 23;—by persevering *obedience*, Heb. v. 9; Ps. cvi. 3; by importunate *prayer*, Heb. iv. 16;—and by entire *dependance*, 1 Pet. ii. 5, 6; Jude, ver. 21, 22.

3. *All christian converts should thus cleave unto him.*—*All*, of every age;—of every religious attainment;—and of every station in the church John. xv. 5; Heb. iii. 12.

4. We should thus cleave unto the Lord "*With purpose of heart*." This should and must be the object of our deliberate *choice*, Deut. xxx. 19, 20;—of our steadfast *resolution*, Josh. xxiv. 15;—and of our incessant care, 1 John ii. 28; Phil. iii. 16. Our text teaches us,

V. THAT AFFECTIONATE EXHORTATION IS CONDUCTIVE TO THE STEADFAST PERSEVERANCE OF BELIEVERS IN CHRIST;—"He exhorted them," &c Here we may observe,

1. *To whom this exhortation should be addressed.* As cleaving unto the Lord is a duty required of all christians, so we find *all* of every description, exhorted in the oracles of God. *Private* christians are urged to this,

John xv. 4; Col. ii. 6; and *public* characters are also thus stimulated to exertion, 1 Tim. iv. 16.

2. *By whom this exhortation should be employed.* It should be given—By all those to whom the *care* of souls is *committed*, 1 Cor. xiv. 3; Col. i. 28;—and by all *private* Christians, in their mutual communications, Heb. iii. 13, and x. 24, 25.

3. *How this exhortation should be enforced.* It should be urged, by the consideration—of *our own total insufficiency*, Jer. x. 23; 2 Cor. iii. 5;—of *Christ's all-sufficiency*, Heb. vii. 25;—of *Satan's malice*, who purposes and seeks to destroy us, 1 Pet. v. 8, 9;—of the dreadful *evils* to which *apostacy* would expose us, Heb. x. 38; Rev. iii. 11; 1 Chron. xxviii. 9;—and of the *blessings* with which God is engaged to crown *unfainting perseverance*, Gal. vi. 9; 2 Pet. i. 10, 11.

THE GREATNESS AND PRECIOUSNESS OF THE PROMISES.

Pet. i. 4.—Whereby are given unto us exceeding great and precious promises; that by these ye might be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust. (S. S.)

COMMENTATORS are not agreed with respect to the connexion of these words—*

Nor is it of any great importance for us to enter into the difficulties of it—

The words themselves, whatever the precise connexion of them may be, are replete with instruction and comfort—

We shall take occasion from them to consider,

I. THE EXCEEDING GREATNESS AND PRECIOUSNESS OF THE PROMISES.

God, in infinite mercy, has given us many “promises”

Fallen man could not claim any thing at God's hands, Psa. cxliii. 2.

We were deserving of nothing but his wrath and indignation, Psa. cxxx. 3

But he was pleased to send his own Son to die for us—

And for the sake of Christ has promised us many blessings—

These promises are “exceeding great”

They offer the pardon of all our sins, Isa. i. 18.

They warrant us to expect strength for the performance of all our duties, 2 Cor. xii. 9.

They call us to enjoy the most intimate fellowship with God, 2 Cor. vi. 16

They assure us of everlasting happiness and glory, John x. 28.

Neither are the wants of the body, or the conveniencies of life overlooked, Matt. vi. 33; 2 Pet. i. 3; 1 Tim. iv. 8.

No wonder then that they should be “precious”

We cannot ascertain their full value—

But every true christian can adopt the language of David, Psa. cxix. 111

But the preciousness of them will further appear, if we consider,

II. THE END FOR WHICH THEY ARE GIVEN.

God would have us to be partakers of the divine nature.

* Some connect *h' &* with “glory and virtue” in the preceding verse, and understands it thus; “by which glorious energy of the gospel are given to us,” &c. Others, understanding the third verse parenthetically, connect *h' &* with “God and Christ” in verse 2, and translate the words “by whom,” &c.

The divine nature does not import the divine essence—

Nor does it mean a personal union with God—

To partake of the divine nature in these respects was the peculiar honor of Jesus Christ—

But the divine nature has respect to the moral perfections of the Deity—
Col. iii. 10.

Of these God would have us to partake abundantly—

It is for this end that he has given the promises.

He does not intend merely to save us from destruction—

He has laid a plan for our everlasting happiness—

But holiness is essential to happiness—

We could not enjoy his presence, if we did not bear his image—

He has therefore given us promises, in order to make us holy—

And the promises, if duly applied, always operate in this manner—

Their suitableness to this end will be manifest, while we contemplate.

III. THE EFFECTS THEY INVARIABLY PRODUCE.

There is a dreadful "corruption in the world through lust"

The desires of men are altogether vitiated—

The indulgence of them produces much corruption in the world—

But God's people "escape" this corruption.

They are not free from all sin—

But they do not live under the allowed dominion of any—

They flee from temptation with fear and trembling—

This is the description given of the saints at Sardis, Rev. iii. 4.

And this is the universal operation of true religion, James i. 27.

They escape it through the operation of the promises.

They have not in themselves a power to keep themselves pure—

But God promises "grace sufficient"—

They therefore trust in his promises, and plead them in prayer—

In so doing, they experience their cleansing efficacy—

Hence St. Paul urges the promises not merely as a motive to holiness, but as the means of attaining it, 2 Cor. vii. 1.

INFER,

1. How foolish are they who neglect Christ!

Christ is the person in whom all the promises are ratified and confirmed.

2 Cor. i. 20.

Nor can we be interested in one promise, unless we be united to Christ—

What madness then is it to neglect that blessed Saviour!—

What unspeakable blessings do the thoughtless world despise!—

Let us "awake from our sleep, and arise from the dead"—

Let us seek Christ with our whole hearts—

All things are ours, if we be his, 1 Cor. iii. 22, 23.

2. How mistaken are they who seek for holiness merely in a way of mortification, or in the exercise of their own powers!

Many seek long after holiness without attaining it—

The reason of this is, that they do not seek it in God's appointed way—

God has given them promises by which they may be made holy—

But they are afraid to embrace them till they can see themselves holy—

Thus do they, in fact, reverse the appointment of God himself—

Let such, however, submit to God's method of imparting a divine nature—

Let them embrace the promises as sinners, that they may become saints—

3. How highly privileged are the people of God!

Whatever is needful for them, in time or eternity, is secured—

For their consolation God has confirmed his promises with an oath, Heb. vi. 17, 18.

And all of them can, like Solomon, attest his fidelity, 1 Kings viii. 56.

Let them therefore treasure up his promises in their hearts—

Let them do this for advancement in holiness as well as comfort—Psa. cxix. 11.

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But we see how glorious was his person, and how exalted his character—

In the same manner his followers are treated with contempt—

But God declares their state to be the most honorable upon earth—

To this effect St. John represents them as slighted by man and honored by God—

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Nor does God withhold it from any on account of their remaining infirmities—

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What an unspeakably blessed state is this!

How different is it from the state they were once in!—

How great the privileges which they enjoy by means of this relation!—

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This resemblance will result from our sight of him—

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Nevertheless he is so to all that truly believe—

The history of the Old Testament affords abundant proof of this—

Abraham rejoiced to see his day, though at a distance, John viii. 56.

Job delighted in death as the means of introducing him to his presence, Job. xix. 25—27.

Moses esteemed reproach for his sake, Heb. xi. 26.

David regarded nothing in earth or heaven in comparison of him, Ps. lxxiii. 25.

Isaiah exulted in the prospect of his incarnation, Isa. ix. 6.

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The virgin, while he was yet in her womb, sang his praises, Luke i. 47.

The angels congratulated the shepherds on his incarnation, Luke ii. 10.

The just and devout Simeon after seeing him, could depart in peace, Ib. ver. 29, 30.

John baptist, as the bridegroom's friend, rejoiced in his voice, John iii. 29.

How precious was he to that Mary who was a sinner! Luke vii. 38.

St. Paul counted all as dung for the knowledge of him, was willing to be bound, or to die for him, and knew no comfort like the expectation of being with him, Phil. iii. 8; Acts xxi. 13; 1 Thess. iv. 18.

The glorified saints and angels incessantly adore him, Rev. v. 12, 13.

The experience of living saints accords with that of those who have gone before—*

The world even wonders at them on account of their attachment to him—

II. WHY HE IS SO PRECIOUS TO THEM.

They have reason enough for their attachment—

They love him *for his own excellence*.

He is infinitely above all created beauty or goodness—

Shall they then regard these qualities in the creature, and not in him?—

Whosoever views him by faith cannot but admire and adore him—

They love him *for his suitableness to their necessities*.

There is in Christ all which believers can want—

Nor can they find any other capable of supplying their need—

Hence they delight in him as their "all in all"—

They love him *for the benefits they receive from him*.

They have received from him pardon, peace, strength, &c.

Can they do otherwise than account him precious?—

We may rather wonder why all do not feel the same attachment.

III. WHY HE IS NOT PRECIOUS TO OTHERS.

There certainly exists no reason on his part; he is good to all—

But unbelievers cannot love him.

1. Because they have no views of his excellency.

The god of this world has blinded them that they cannot see him, 2 Cor. iv. 4.

How then should they esteem him, whose excellency they know not?—

* There are many to whom he is preciousness itself; who account him as the pearl of great price, desire to know more of him, grieve that they cannot love him more, think afflictions good when they lead to him, and despise all in comparison of him.

They must of necessity be indifferent to him, as men are to things of little value—

2. Because they feel no need of him.

Christ is valuable only as a remedy, Isa. xxxii. 2.

Nor can any man desire him as a physician, a fountain, a refuge, unless he feel some disease, some thirst, some danger—

APPLICATION.

All, who have any spiritual discernment, feel a love to Christ—

He is beloved of the Father, of angels, and of saints—

None but devils and unbelievers despise him—

And shall any, who do not account him precious, be objects of his regard?—

Surely his final decision will correspond with that declaration, 1 Sam.

ii. 30.

Let all then believe in him, that he may become precious to them—

Nor let any be dejected because they cannot delight in him as they wish—

The more we love him, the more shall we lament the coldness of our love—

In a little time all the powers of our souls shall act without control—

.Then shall we glory in him with unrestrained and unabated ardor.

THE FRUITS OF GOD'S FAVOUR.

Hos. xiv. 5—7.—I will be as the dew to Israel: he shall grow as the lily, and cast forth his roots as Lebanon. His branches shall spread, and his beauty shall be as the olive-tree, and his smell as Lebanon. They that dwell under his shadow shall return; they shall revive as the corn, and grow as the vine: the scent thereof shall be as the wine of Lebanon. (S. S.)

THERE are instances of beautiful imagery in the scriptures equal to any that can be found in the works of the most renowned authors—

They are enhanced too by the importance of the subjects they contain—

In both respects the passage before us deserves peculiar attention—

Imagination cannot conceive a richer display of divine blessings than God here vouchsafes to his church and people—

I. THE FAVOUR WHICH GOD WILL SHEW HIS PEOPLE.

The metaphor of “dew” is at once simple and sublime—

The benefits of the dew are but little known in this climate—

But in Judea the metaphor would appear very significant—*

For some time after the creation, dew supplied the place of rain, Gen. ii. 6.

And, after rain was given, it still remained of great use—

The scriptures speak of it as an important blessing—See Gen. xxvii. 28, 39, and Deut. xxxiii. 13.

They represent the withholding of it as a calamity and curse, 2 Sam. i. 21

The communications of God to his people are fitly compared to it.

It distils silently and almost imperceptibly on the ground—

Yet it insinuates itself into the plants on which it falls—

And thus maintains their vegetative powers—

* Where the rains are periodical, and the climate hot, the dews are more abundant.

In the same manner God's visits to his people are secret—*

But he gains access to their inmost souls, 2 Cor. vi. 16.

He cheers and revives their fainting spirits—

And thus he fulfils to them his own most gracious promises, Isa. lviii. 11.

Were his communications refreshing only, and not influential on the conduct, we might be afraid of enthusiasm—

But his favor invariably discovers itself by,

II. ITS FRUITS AND EFFECTS.

The effects of the dew are seen by the progress of vegetation—

The descent of God's Spirit on the soul produces

Growth.

The "lily" springs up speedily, but is of short duration—

The cedars of "Lebanon cast forth their roots" to a great extent—

Thus the soul that is refreshed with divine communications—

The quickness of its growth often excites admiration—

Its stability defies the assaults of earth and hell—

While it "spreads its branches," and displays its vigor in every good word and work—

Beauty.

There is peculiar grace and "beauty in the olive-tree"—

And such is there in the soul that communes much with God—

What a lustre was there on the face of Moses, when he came from the mount!—Exod. xxxiv. 30.

And how is the lively christian "beautified with salvation?"—

His outward conduct is rendered amiable in every part—

His inward dispositions of humility and love are ornaments which even God himself admires, 1 Pet. iii. 4.

He is transformed into the very image of his God, Eph. iv. 23, 24.

Nor shall his beauty be ever suffered to decay—†

Fragrancy.‡

Lebanon was no less famous for its odoriferous vines than for its lofty cedars—

And does not the christian diffuse a savor all around him?—2 Cor. ii. 14.

How animated his discourse when God is with him!—

How refreshing and delightful to those who enjoy his conversation!—||

How pleasing is it also to his God and Saviour! Mal. iii. 16; Cant. iv. 16

In proportion as he lives near to God, he fulfils that duty, Col. iv. 6.

Fruitfulness.

The "corn and the vine" are just emblems of a christian's fruitfulness—

They often wear the most unpromising appearance—

Yet are they "revived" by the genial influences of the sun and rain—

Thus the christian may be reduced to a drooping or desponding state—

But the renewed influences of God's Spirit will revive him—

They make him "fruitful in all the fruits of righteousness"

* He comes not in the wind, the earthquake, or the fire, but in the small still voice, 1 Kings xix. 11, 12.

† Psa. i. 3. The olive, as an evergreen, retains its beauty; and in this respect also is a fit emblem of the true christian.

‡ This is twice mentioned in the text, and therefore deserves peculiar notice.

|| See him before the sun has exhaled the dew, or the world abated the fervor of his affections; and how does he verify that saying! Prov. xvi. 24.

They too, who "dwell under *his* shadow," and are most nearly connected with him, will participate his blessings—*

INFER,

1. How honorable and blessed is the christian's state!

Often is he favored with visits from above, John xiv. 23.

And glorious are the effects produced by God upon him—

The whole creation scarcely affords images whereby his blessedness may be adequately represented—

Who then is so honorable? who so happy?—

Let all endeavor to maintain a sense of their high privileges—

And to "walk worthy of the calling wherewith they are called"—

2. How hopeful is the state of those who wait on God!

The promises in the text were given as an answer to prayer—

And they are made to all, who, "like Israel," plead with God—

If the dew be withheld from others, it shall descend on them, Judges vi. 37, 38.

Its descent shall accomplish the utmost wishes of their souls—

They shall soon experience the fulfilment of that word, Isa. xl. 31.

EVERY CHRISTIAN POSSESSES THE SPIRIT OF CHRIST.

Rom. viii. 9.—Now if any man have not the Spirit of Christ he is none of his. (B.)

AN important and alarming declaration, which the professors of christianity would do well to consider maturely, and lay to heart; and particularly those who content themselves with a form of godliness, while they are destitute of the power of it. The apostle had just observed, "ye are not in the flesh," in a natural and unregenerate state, under the government of your animal appetites and passions, or of your corrupt nature, "if so be that the Spirit of God dwell in you;" for wherever he dwells, he governs, having regenerated our corrupt nature, and imparted a principle of genuine and true holiness. Then he adds, "Now," or, *but* "if any man have not the Spirit of Christ," residing in him, and forming him to such a temper and behavior, as characterizes a disciple of Christ, whatever that man's profession may be, "he is none of his."—But let us inquire,

I. WHAT IS IMPLIED IN BEING CHRIST'S.

There is a sense in which all men are *his*; viz. by right of creation; John i. 3; Col. i. 16; of preservation; Col. i. 17; of redemption. 1 Cor. vi. 20. But the apostle is to be understood in another and further sense. His true followers belong to him, as subjects to a prince; Psal. ii. 8; Matt. xxii. 11; Phil. ii. 11; as servants to a master; ch. xiv. 7—9; 2 Cor. v. 14, 15; as friends; John xv. 13—15; as brethren and sisters; Heb. ii. 11, 12; as children to a father; Heb. ii. 13; as a spouse to a husband; ch. vii. 4; 2 Cor. xi. 2; Eph. v. 25—32; Rev. xix. 7; as branches to a tree; John xv. 1; or as members to the head of the body. 1 Cor. xii. 12, 27; Rom. xii. 5; Eph. i. 22, 23.

*If he be a master, a parent, and especially a minister, the benefit of *his* revivals will extend to many.

II. WHAT IS MEANT BY THE SPIRIT OF CHRIST.

Not, as some think, merely the mind of Christ, but the Holy Ghost, the Spirit of God, is here intended. See context. This is called the Spirit of Christ, because he had it, and has it without measure; John iii. 34; Rev. iii. 1; he has purchased it for his followers by his death, the price of our redemption; he has received it for them; Psal. lxxviii. 18; Acts ii. 33; he has promised it to them. As the Holy Spirit is the promise of the Father, emphatically, Acts i. 4, so also of the Son. Luke xxiv. 49; John xiv. xv. xvi. How great the consolation of this to those who are desiring and looking for these sacred influences, that they were purchased and received for us by our friend, kinsman, brother, husband, and are promised by the Amen, the faithful and true witness! He actually confers it. John iy. 10; vii. 38; Acts ii. 38, 39.—

III. HOW IT APPEARS THAT WE MUST HAVE THIS SPIRIT IN ORDER TO BE CHRIST'S.

We cannot be Christ's unless we know him; John x. 14, 27; but we cannot know him without the Spirit of Christ. Matt. xi. 27; Gal. i. 16; John xvi. 14.—We cannot be Christ's unless we love Christ; 1 Cor. xvi. 22; but we cannot love him without that Spirit, the fruit of which is love. Gal. v. 22; Rom. v. 5.—We cannot be Christ's unless we obey him; 2 Cor. v. 15; Rom. xiv. 7; John xv. 14, xiv. 21; Heb. v. 9; but we cannot obey him without the inspiration and aid of his Spirit. John xv. 5; 2 Cor. iii. 5.—We cannot be Christ's without we have an interest in him, and be able to say, "My Beloved is mine, and I am his;" but this interest in him we cannot have without his Spirit. 1 Cor. xii. 13;—We cannot be Christ's without union with him, such as branches have with a tree, or members with their head; but this we cannot have without his Spirit.—We cannot be Christ's unless we have his mind in us; but this we cannot have without his Spirit; meekness, long-suffering, goodness, &c., being fruits of the Spirit.—We cannot be Christ's without we be new creatures; 2 Cor. v. 17; Eph. iv. 21—24; and it is impossible we should be so without his Spirit. Tit. iii. 5.

IN CONCLUSION observe,

How important a matter for inquiry to each, whether he has received the Spirit of Christ, and is the subject of his enlightening, gracious, and sanctifying operations, in consequence of which he is brought to know, love, and serve the Lord Jesus, to have an interest in him, and union with him, and to be "created in him to good works."—How needful and indispensable a duty to apply to Christ, to whom is entrusted the dispensation of the Spirit, that we may obtain, and having obtained, may receive more and more of his influence and grace. Perceiving the necessity and excellence of this gift we must ask for it, we must thirst, John vii. 37, we must believe. Gal. iii. 13, 14.

WALKING WITH GOD.

Gen. v. 24.—And Enoch walked with God. (Sk.)

OF this excellent man, but little is recorded in the word of God; four verses in this chapter, one in the epistle to the Hebrews, and two in the epis-

tle of Jude, contain all that we learn respecting him. These records inform us,

1. *That he was the seventh from Adam*; or his descendant of the seventh generation. So the apostle pronounces him, Jude 14.

Hence he must have been contemporary with Adam, and probably enjoyed familiar converse with him during more than two hundred years; for Enoch was born in the six hundred and twenty-second year of the world, and Adam did not die till the year nine hundred and thirty. And converse with one who could, and no doubt did, so fully inform him respecting the creation, fall, and redemption of man, must have been a great privilege.—He was also favored with the good examples of the Patriarchs; of Seth, Enos, Cainan, Mahalaleel, and Jared, his pious father, whose piety may be fairly presumed from the name he gave his son; for the name Enoch signifies to instruct, initiate, or dedicate; and intimates that Jared had dedicated him to God from his birth, and was concerned to train him up in the way he should go. Thus in Enoch God's word was exemplified, Prov. xxii. 6. But amidst these advantages, he also witnessed the prevalence of ungodliness in the earth; for he lived when men both acted and spoke wickedly against God: these he faithfully warned, "saying, Behold," &c., Jude 15. Hence we learn.

2. *That he was a prophet*: He "prophesied." This he did

By predicting future events; particularly the general judgment.—And by teaching sacred truth—reproving sin—warning the rebellious—and encouraging God's "saints" to hope for glory with him.

3. We also learn *that he was the pious head of a family*; "And Enoch lived," &c., v. 21, 22. He walked with God both in his single and in his marriage state.—He did not shun society to become pious, nor forsake society to practise godliness; but amidst the business and cares of a numerous growing family, he still carefully and resolutely walked with God. This leads us to notice,

I. HIS GENERAL CHARACTER: He walked with God. Here let us consider,

1. *What walking with God supposes.* To discover this, we must observe,—All mankind are naturally fallen; In Adam, Rom. v. 18; and by their own personal transgressions, Psal. xiv. 2, 3.—Our degeneracy implies enmity of heart, and actual rebellion against God, Rom. viii. 7; Isa. i. 2.—Consequently, agreement with God must precede our walking with him, Amos iii. 3. This agreement must include the removal of our guilt by God's forgiving mercy, Mic. vii. 18; and the removal of our enmity by a gracious circumcision of heart, Deut. xxx. 6; Rom. viii. 16, and v. 1, 5; 1 John iv. 19.

2. *What walking with God implies.* It must imply,

Faith in God, Heb. xi. 5, 6. Faith in him as our proprietor, who has a just claim on our services, Psal. xcv. 3, 6, 7, 8; and faith in him as our Redeemer, all-sufficient to bless and keep us, Gen. xvii. 1, and xv. 1.

A conformity to God's way; That way prescribed in his word, Psalm cxix. 30. The way of communion with him through Christ, John xiv. 6; Heb. x. 19—22. And that way suggested by his relations and perfections. The way of grateful self-dedication, Rom. xii. 1, and of humble affiance, 1 Pet. v. 7.

The *habitual recollection of God's presence*, Psal. xvi. 8; Prov. iii. 6.

The *enjoyment of his manifested favor*, Heb. xi. 5; Psal. lxxxix. 15, 16. Hence observe,

3. *Some advantages which result from walking with God.* As

Guidance in difficulties, Prov. iii. 6. "He shall direct," &c., Psa. xxxii. 8.—Preservation from falling, Psa. xvi. 8.—Assistance in weakness, Isa. xli. 10.—Comfort in afflictions, Psa. xlii. 1, and xciv. 19.—And improvement in piety, Prov. iv. 18. Having observed what is implied in this good man's general character, let us, for our farther instruction, consider.

II. SOME PECULIAR CIRCUMSTANCES CONNECTED WITH IT; Particularly,

1. *The period of its commencement, and the time of its continuance.*

It commenced in what may be considered his *early youth*; when he had not lived the twelfth part of the then usual age of man. This shows us, that early piety is acceptable to God, Prov. viii. 17. Seek it, Eccl. xii. 1; for early habits are most easily formed, and most lasting, Lam. iii. 27.—It continued at least *three hundred years*. This teaches us—That the pleasures of religion never cloy, Psa. lxxiii. 3, 4; and that God's grace is sufficient for the longest pilgrimage, Job xvii. 11.

2. *The relations under which it was sustained.* The relation of—a *family governor*. Hence, we see the falsehood of three common suppositions. First, "That solitude is necessary to piety." This is an error of superstition; as christians we are called to sociability, Matt. v. 14—16. Secondly, "That religion is injurious to social duties and comforts." This is an error of prejudice, which is confuted by many living characters, Prov. xii. 26. Thirdly, "That we serve God only when we engage in acts of devotion." This is an error of ignorance; for we also serve God acceptably, when we serve mankind in obedience to him, Acts xiii. 36; Gal. v. 13, and vi. 2, 10. This character was also sustained by Enoch, under the relation of—a *public teacher*. From this example, we learn, that teachers of others should be careful to walk with God themselves;—in domestic life, that they may engage their families in God's service, Josh. xxiv. 15;—in public life, that their labors may be blessed by God, Psa. li. 12, 13; Mal. ii. 6.

3. *The scenes amidst which it was preserved.* These were examples of prevailing ungodliness; when piety was generally reproached. Thus, when iniquity is general, it is our duty to be singular, Exod. xxiii. 2, for we are called by God to be a peculiar people, Tit. ii. 14; Rom. xii. 2.—A resolute confession of God in the face of an opposing world, is highly pleasing to him, Heb. xi. 5. "He pleased God," Numb. xiv. 24; Matt. x. 23. Those who honor God are honored by him, 1 Sam. ii. 30. This appears from,

4. *The glorious event which succeeded this holy walk.* "God took him." He was translated body and soul to heaven, without seeing death.—This removal was *gainful to him*; it perfected his felicity. So the death of all true believers is followed by the eternal consummation of all their happiness, Phil. i. 21, 23; Luke xxiii. 43.

It was *honorable to God*. To his wisdom, in discriminating characters; to his goodness, in rewarding the faithful; and to his truth, in fulfilling his promises. So is the death of all his saints, Psa. cxvi. 15, and lviii. 11.

It was *beneficial to mankind*. It teaches mankind in all ages, that *there is another and a better world reserved for the righteous*:—as the ascension of Elijah and our Lord did afterwards, Heb. xi. 16; 1 Pet. i. 3, 4, 5.

That *piety is extensively profitable*; being evidently conducive to our eternal, as well as to our present welfare, 1 Tim. iv. 8.

That *the redemption of our bodies as well as our souls is certain*. For we see God able and faithful to fulfil his engagements, Hos. xiii. 14; Phil. iii. 2.

That *an early removal, is no loss to the righteous*. For what is taken from time, is added to a blissful eternity. Rev. vii. 14—17.

And that a sudden removal, when God appoints it, is no cause of terror to those who die in him; for to all such characters sudden death becomes sudden glory, Rev. xiv. 13; 2 Cor. v. 8; Isa. lvii. 1, 2.

This interesting example teaches us,

1. *That to walk with God, is the common privilege of mankind.*—For what Enoch did, God calls us to do in his word, Jer. vi. 16; Mic. vi. 8; and the grace enjoyed by him is also free for us, Rom. x. 12.

We have free access to God through Christ, Eph. ii. 18; 1 Pet. iii. 18. And strength to walk with God is promised by him, Zech. x. 12.

2. *To walk with God is the indispensable duty of mankind.* For none can dwell with God hereafter, but such as walk with him here, Ps. v. 4, 5.

3. *To walk with God is the highest interest of mankind.* It is the sure and only way to heaven, Ps. lxxxiv. 11. Like Enoch, set yourselves to walk with God:—desire it, Ps. cxix. 5;—and in God's strength resolve on it, Ps. cxvi. 9, 18.

PRACTICAL RELIGION ENFORCED.

John xiii. 17. If ye know these things, happy are ye if ye do them. (H. H.)

So little was the virtue of humility understood among the Heathen, that neither the Greeks nor Romans had a word whereby to express the idea. The lowliness of mind and poverty of spirit which we admire as the summit of christian excellence, they would have accounted meanness and pusillanimity. But our blessed Lord has instructed us in a far clearer manner than the philosophers of old could do, and has illustrated every one of his instructions by his own example. The act of condescension that is recorded in the chapter before us, very strongly exemplifies the virtue of which we are speaking: though Jesus was the Lord both of heaven and earth, and his disciples were no higher than poor fishermen, he made himself their servant, and performed for them the meanest office, even that of washing their feet: and then told them that such was the spirit which he would have them cultivate, and such the conduct he would have them pursue towards all their fellow-disciples. He declared, moreover, that such views of christian excellence, attended with a corresponding practice, would prove to them a source of the richest happiness.

We shall not however confine our views to this particular virtue; but shall take occasion from the words of our text to point out, in a more general manner, the connexion between “knowing and doing” the will of God. We shall shew,

I. THEIR WORTHLESSNESS WHEN SEPARATE—

As for doing, without knowing, the will of God, that is impossible; since knowledge is, and must be, the foundation of all practice. No act can be a religious act, unless it be done with a direct reference to the will of God ordering and directing it to be done. But knowledge may exist without practice: but when it does so, it is altogether worthless.

1. It has no intrinsic excellence—

The devils have knowledge in common with us, and probably to a far greater extent: but do they possess any thing that is truly good? *Virtue is*

good, even though it reside only in the mind, and have no scope for exercise; but *knowledge*, when considered without reference to practice, is as empty and worthless as ignorance itself.

2. It is productive of no good—

The science of astronomy, and the knowledge of the magnet, are among the most useful of human attainments: but of what use would they be, if not applied to practical purposes? In the same manner, the knowledge of medicine would never benefit any one, if it were not improved for the healing or preventing of disorders. Thus it is also with respect to divine knowledge. We may be able to delineate all the perfections of God, to trace all the ways of his providence, and to open all the wonders of redemption; we may be able to descant upon virtue, in all its bearings and relations: yea, as the apostle says, we may “understand all mysteries and all knowledge;” and what are we the better for it all, or what good do we effect by it, if it float only upon the mind, and never operate upon our life and conversation? We are only “as sounding brass or as tinkling cymbals.” If it be said, that, by communicating our knowledge, we may influence others; *this* only amounts to what we are insisting on, that knowledge is of use only in reference to practice; and, that it then only does good. when it stirs men up to a suitable improvement of it.

3. It only aggravates our condemnation—

We are assured, that, “to him that knoweth to do good, and doeth it not, to him it is sin.” Jam. iv. 17. Exactly as much good therefore as “*sin*” does us, so much does unimproved knowledge. Knowledge is a talent, of which we are to give an account: and “to whom much is given, of him will the more be required.” The man who knew his Lord’s will, and did it not, was beaten with many stripes: while the ignorant offender was beaten with comparatively few. Luke xii. 47, 48. Thus shall we find it in the day of judgment. If on the one hand, unavoidable ignorance will be considered as an extenuation of our guilt, so, on the other hand, will unsanctified knowledge prove a fearful aggravation of it.

We would not, however, depreciate either knowledge or practice; but rather point out,

II. THEIR EXCELLENCE WHEN COMBINED—

When connected with each other as the root and the fruit, they have an efficacy,

1. To please God—

The fruits of righteousness that spring from an enlightened mind, are truly acceptable to God. Heb. xiii. 16; 1 Pet. ii. 5. They answer the end for which he originally gave us to his Son, Eph. i. 4, and ii. 10, and for which his Son laid down his life. Tit. ii. 14. There is not any one act that can flow from just views of ourselves and of Christ, which God will not behold with complacency, and accept with joy. Matt. x. 42; Jer. ix. 24.

2. To bring comfort into the soul—

Works of piety are like the incense which, when offered by the priest, not only honored God, but also regaled the offerer. It is truly said, (though many who admire the expression have very inadequate notions of its import,) that religion’s “ways are ways of pleasantness and peace,” and that “in keeping God’s commandments there is great reward.” Who ever set himself to serve and honor God, without finding that “the work of righteousness was peace, and the effect of righteousness was quietness and assurance for ever?” It cannot fail but that those who abound in the exercise of virtue, must have the testimony of their own consciences respecting it; and wher-

over that is, there must be a never-failing source of joy and peace. 2 Cor. i. 12.

3. To embolden us in reference to the day of judgment—

That there is no *merit* in our works is certain: and if we were to found our hopes of acceptance with God upon them as meritorious, we should delude ourselves to our eternal ruin. Nevertheless we are authorized to expect that God will deal with us *according to* our works: and, if we have the testimony of our own consciences that it is our endeavor to “walk worthy of God unto all pleasing,” we may “assure our hearts before him,” and “have confidence towards him” in reference to his future judgment. 1 John iii. 18—21, and iv. 17. Knowing in our own souls that we have fought a good fight and kept the faith, we may say without doubt or fear, “Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, shall give me.” 2 Tim. iv. 7, 8.

4. To augment our everlasting happiness—

Who need be told, that men will be rewarded in proportion to their improvement of their talents? Luke vi. 14, and xix. 16, 17; 1 Cor. iii. 8. This is so plain a truth, that it cannot be denied; and so encouraging a truth, that it ought not to be concealed. A life of holiness is even now recompensed by the richest consolations; but its full value will be known only in heaven.

From this subject we shall take occasion to,

1. Condole with the ignorant—

We have before observed, that knowledge is the parent of all acceptable obedience. What then must be your state while you are ignorant of those great things which belong unto your peace? God himself has told you, that you will find “no favor” at his hands, Isa. xxvii. 11, but will inevitably and eternally perish. Hos. iv. 6. Do but reflect on the condition of a soul that finds “no favor” at the hands of an angry God: surely “better were it for that person that he had never been born.”

2. Counsel the enlightened—

Value not yourselves upon your knowledge, if you have not a practice suitable to it: for, it is “not the hearer of the law that is just before God, but the doers of the law shall be justified.” Rom. ii. 13. You may say, “Lord, Lord,” and profess to have known and served him in many things; but you can never enter into the kingdom of heaven, if you have not cheerfully and unreservedly performed his will. Matt. vii. 21, 23. Take care therefore that you “be not hearers only of his word, deceiving your own selves; but be doers of it also; for then only shall ye be blessed in your deed.” Jam. i. 22—25.

3. Congratulate the practical Christian—

“Happy are ye,” God himself being witness. Every prominent feature of your character has been mentioned by our Lord as a distinct and certain ground of blessedness. Matt. v. 3—12. You are fully “compared to a wise man who built his house upon a rock.” Matt. vii. 24—27. Compare the difference between such a man, and a foolish man that builds his house upon the sand: and you will then see your own happiness in a just point of view. Hold on then in this good way; and “as you have learned how to walk and to please God, see that ye abound more and more.” 1 Thess. iv. 1.

FRUITS OF RIGHTEOUSNESS.

Phil. i. 11.—Being filled with the fruits of righteousness, which are by Jesus Christ unto the glory and praise of God. (Sk.)

SUCH was the apostle's desire and prayer for the Philippian christians. He had previously preached among them the gospel of Christ; and witnessed the demonstration of its power in their personal salvation. But when he wrote this epistle, he was a "prisoner of Jesus Christ for the Gentiles." Through the malice of his enemies, he was not permitted either to engage in the public work of the ministry, or to visit the churches of the saints. But his devout and zealous spirit could not be confined in the contracted precincts of his degraded dungeon. While he was detained from his regular ministerial labors, he wrote some of his most excellent epistles, to establish and encourage the primitive believers, in the faith and hope of the gospel. And to his pastoral instructions, he added fervent prayers and intercession for the welfare of his christian brethren. The text constitutes a part of a comprehensive prayer, which he offered to "the God of all grace," for the Philippian church: the whole of which is appropriate and sublime, and well adapted for general utility. The words selected for our present consideration, regard the nature—the fruits—the author—and the results of righteousness.

I. THE NATURE OF RIGHTEOUSNESS. We may observe, First, *The term righteousness is diversified in its meaning.* To ascertain its precise signification, we should consider the different objects of its application. Sometimes it refers to the Divine Being, and signifies the purity of his nature, and the perfection of his works, *Psa. cxlv. 17.* It also applied to the Redeemer, both in his personal and mediatorial character, *2 Cor. v. 21.* We also read of the righteousness of the law, which implies uniform obedience to all its precepts and ordinances, as a perfect rule of moral rectitude, *Eph. i. 6.* Righteousness is also possessed by a man as a believer, and it is *relative* in its character—*internal* in its principle—and *practical* in its influence. This is the evangelical righteousness of faith in Christ, *Phil. iii. 9.*

Secondly, *Righteousness in the text signifies personal holiness.* Sin has corrupted all our moral powers, and rendered our souls unholiness. But when we believe in Christ, we are freely justified and "saved by the washing of regeneration, and the renewing of the Holy Ghost." The divine nature is imparted, which consists in "righteousness and true holiness," as a meetness for "the inheritance of the saints in light." Thus, the work of God in the souls of his people, is called, "the *work of righteousness*," and the *kingdom of righteousness*, and grace reigning *through righteousness* unto eternal life."

II. THE FRUITS OF RIGHTEOUSNESS. This part of our subject, suggests the following truths. First, *Christian righteousness is productive of gracious fruits.* These fruits are both *internal* in the heart, and *external* in the life. The apostle speaks of the former, the latter will follow as a natural consequence. The fruits of righteousness include the exercise of unfeigned faith—peace which passeth all understanding—the love of God shed abroad in the heart—the testimony of a good conscience—the humble, heavenly mind of Christ—the implantation of every spiritual grace—joy unspeakable, and fully of glory—the indwelling, and operations of the Spirit, producing holy principles and dispositions, which practically appear "in all holy conversation and godliness."

Secondly. *The fruits of righteousness are abundant and progressive.* Hence the apostle prays that the Philippians might be *filled* with those fruits, which implies an *increasing plenitude* of grace and holiness. Perhaps he had reference to a very fruitful tree, that has all its branches laden with rich fruit, in a high state of perfection. It is certain, all the righteous are *really*, though not *equally* fruitful. Some bring forth "thirty, some sixty, and some an hundred fold." To be *filled* with the fruits of righteousness, is to realize *exalted degrees* of piety—to grow in every christian attainment—to "comprehend the breadth, and length, and depth, and height, of the love of Christ; and be *filled* with all the fulness of God." There is a *fulness* of grace here, and of glory hereafter, which we should desire and pray to enjoy.

III. THE AUTHOR OF RIGHTEOUSNESS. It is "by Jesus Christ." We are naturally unrighteous, and therefore all our righteousness, as christians, is of the Lord, through the mediation of the Saviour. First, *Righteousness is purchased by Jesus Christ as our Redeemer.* For this purpose, he was manifested in the flesh—fulfilled the righteousness of the law—died a sacrifice for the sins of the world—"made reconciliation for iniquity—and brought in everlasting righteousness, which is unto, and upon all them that believe." Jesus Christ having thus opened a new and living way of pardon and salvation, is justly styled, "The Lord our righteousness;" because by his atonement, he has *merited* righteousness and eternal glory for perishing sinners, Rom. iii. 22—26.

Secondly, *Righteousness is derived from Jesus Christ as our Saviour.* It is only through *believing* we can be saved; and faith is counted for righteousness, by virtue of the precious blood of Christ, that ratified the everlasting covenant. In him there is a plenitude of grace for the salvation of sinners; and when we believe in his name, he is "made unto us wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, and redemption." We receive of his fulness every grace and blessing to constitute us *relatively, personally, and practically* righteous. And through union with him, and participation of the influences of his Spirit, we become fruitful in righteousness, "that we may be sincere, and without offence, till the day of Christ," John xv. 1—8.

IV. THE RESULTS OF RIGHTEOUSNESS. "Unto the glory and praise of God." The *essential glory* of the divine essence is infinite, and therefore unchangeable; but the *manifestation* of his *glorious perfections* is the original design of all his works. Consider, First, Righteousness is "to the glory and praise of God," *in the scheme of redemption.* In this, we behold the *glory* of the wisdom, power, love, mercy, justice, and holiness of God displayed; in creating, preserving, redeeming, and saving rebellious sinners. God is evidently *glorified* in the origin, author, work, design, and effects of our redemption. His glory is thus made manifest, both to angels and men. Psa. lxxxv. 10; Luke ii. 14; 2 Cor. iii. 18.

Secondly, Righteousness is "to the glory and praise of God," *in the subjects of salvation.* They are conscious that all their good comes from him: and therefore, they gratefully ascribe praise and adoration unto him for all his benefits, Psa. ciii. 1—5. And in all their designs and deportment they "show forth his praise, do all to his glory, and glorify him in their bodies and spirits, which are his." And in the kingdom of heaven they will ascribe salvation, glory, honor, and power, unto God and the Lamb, for ever and ever, Rev. i. 5, 6. Let these observations stimulate our desires—*promote* our devotion—and inspire us with praise.

JACOB'S DYING CONFIDENCE.

Genesis xlix. 18.—I have waited for thy salvation, O Lord. (Sk.)

THE history of the patriarch Jacob is well known, and forms a very important and interesting portion of sacred biography. It is replete with admonitory caution and consolatory encouragements, which are highly profitable for the instruction and comfort of the saints. In the early part of his life, he was favored with the religious tuition and example of his eminently pious father, whose distinguished character is stamped with immortal renown in the imperishable annals of revelation. But notwithstanding the many advantages which he enjoyed in his youth, he did not on some occasions maintain that strict integrity of conduct, which is according to godliness. Yet it is evident, from the general aspect of his deportment, that he was deeply imbued with the spirit of holiness, and piously devoted to the God of his fathers. He firmly believed in the promised Messiah, and was repeatedly privileged with special tokens of the divine mercy and approbation. This chapter records the closing scene of his protracted life and labors, and contains his dying requests and solemn charges to his children, intermixed with various predictions of the future events connected with the twelve tribes of his family. And in the midst of his departing advices and devotions, he exclaimed in the text, with holy confidence and joy, "I have waited for thy salvation, O Lord." Thus this venerable patriarch commended his soul into the hand of his covenant God, in sure and certain hope of a blissful immortality beyond the grave. In attempting an improvement of his dying appeal, we shall notice,

I. THE IMPORTANT OBJECT FOR WHICH THE PATRIARCH WAITED—"Thy *salvation*." Some suppose that Jacob refers merely to *temporal* deliverances, but it is much more probable that he desired the *complete* salvation of his soul, through the divine Shiloh: which includes all the blessings of grace here, and of glory hereafter. In this general and extended sense of the term, salvation may be considered as only commenced in a state of probation, and perfected in the world of retribution.

1. *Salvation is present in its commencement.* It is the work of grace already begun in them that believe. It is not only a *future portion* joyfully anticipated, but also a *present privilege* actually enjoyed. The Lord *now* personally saves his people from the guilt, the power, and the pollution of sin, Eph. i. 7; Rom. vi. 14; Titus iii. 5;—from the curse and condemnation of the law, Rom. viii. 16; Gal. iii. 13;—from the tyranny and kingdom of Satan, Acts xxvi. 18; Col. i. 13;—from all their malicious and powerful enemies, and under every affliction and calamity of human life. Isa. liv. 17; 2 Cor. xii. 9. This salvation is progressive in its character, and admits of continual increase in christian knowledge, purity, and happiness. But this glorious state of grace is only the *beginning* and *pledge* of its final perfection.

2. *Salvation is future in its consummation.* Though the righteous are now initially saved from *moral* evil, and participate "holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord," yet they are not actually delivered from *natural* evil while in a probationary state. In the present world they are always surrounded with enemies, exposed to dangers, and subject to complicated trials. Here we have no continuing city, but seek one to come. "There remaineth a rest to the people of God." He saved them through every

period of their mortal existence; in the dark valley of the shadow of death; and in the great day of his wrath, when he shall come "to make up his jewels," Heb. ix. 28; Col. iii. 3, 4. Their bodies also shall be changed and fashioned like unto Christ's glorious body, and with their immortal spirits shall be *fully* and *eternally* saved from sin and all its direful consequences, to the perfect and endless fruition of the Deity, in whose "presence there is fulness of joy, and pleasures for evermore," Rom. ii. 7. Such was the comprehensive and dignified object of Jacob's pious anticipation; and the source from whence he expected to derive it will appear by considering,

II. THE GLORIOUS BEING IN WHOM THE PATRIARCH CONFIDED.—*Thy salvation, O Lord.*" He did not trust in the virtues of his ancestors, nor expect salvation on the ground of his descent from Abraham, "the father of the faithful." He exercised implicit confidence in the Lord Jehovah, as the origin and donor of every blessing. He knew that salvation was solely a divine achievement, and therefore emphatically called it, "*Thy salvation, O Lord.*"

1. *Salvation is divinely devised and provided.* When we had destroyed ourselves, in God was found our help. He piteously beheld our perishing condition, as depraved and guilty sinners, and in infinite wisdom and mercy devised a glorious scheme of reconciliation through the intervention of a Divine Mediator, 1 Tim. ii. 5, 6. By the actual accomplishment of his scheme of redemption, the perfections of the Creator are glorified—the moral law is practically magnified—a perfect atonement is made for sin—and eternal salvation is amply provided in Jesus Christ, for "the world that lieth in wickedness," John iii. 16; Acts v. 31; 1 Tim. i. 15. "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will towards men!"

2. *Salvation is divinely revealed and promised.* It was primarily announced to our original progenitors in paradise, and was subsequently made known to the patriarchs and prophets, but is now more fully brought to light by the superior dispensation of "grace and truth," Col. i. 26—28. And it is not only explicitly revealed for our instruction, but is also graciously promised for our encouragement. The Lord faithfully engages to bestow every blessing of the covenant of grace on them who "unfeignedly repent, and believe his holy gospel," Isa. lv. 6, 7; Matt. xi. 28, 29; Acts xvi. 31. And all the divine promises are exceeding great and precious in their nature and effects, and infallibly certain in their authority and fulfilment. God is not slack concerning his promise, for his word is true from the beginning, 2 Cor. i. 20.

3. *Salvation is divinely imparted and realized.* Omnipotence alone is adequate to save the soul from sin and ruin. All human efforts, however wise and salutary, are totally inefficient and hopeless, 2 Cor. iii. 5.—But the infinite Jehovah is both able and willing to redeem us from all our iniquities. He can enlighten the darkest mind—pardon the most aggravated guilt,—renovate the hardest heart—and save to the uttermost all them that believe in his name. He is the only *Author* and *Finisher* of the salvation of his people, and from him every good and perfect gift freely descends, Eph. ii. 8, 9. He begins and completes the work of righteousness; and it will ever remain an important and consoling truth, that "salvation belongeth unto the Lord." In him therefore, like Jacob, we should put our trust, and patiently expect his saving grace. And for our direction and encouragement, the text specifies,

III. THE SACRED EXERCISE IN WHICH THE PATRIARCH WAS OCCUPIED.—
"I have waited for thy salvation," &c. This language expresses the gracious state of mind in which this excellent saint both lived and died. He long waited for salvation according to the will of God, and was not disappointed. Let us therefore follow his pious example.

1. *We must wait for salvation patiently.* We have all gone astray from God "like lost sheep;" and have incurred his righteous displeasure. We are condemned by his law, and obnoxious to his wrath; but if we return unto him with penitent and obedient hearts, he will have mercy upon us, and abundantly pardon our sins, Luke xv. 20—24. Thus Jacob humbled himself before his God, and devoutly acknowledged, that he was "less than the least of all his mercies," chap. xxxii. 10.—Genuine repentance is invariably necessary to obtain salvation, and it is only by thus *seeking* and *waiting* for it, that we participate its personal benefits, Hosea xiv. 1, 2, 4.—"The Lord is nigh unto them that are of a broken heart, and saveth such as be of a contrite spirit."

2. *We must wait for salvation believingly.* This is the only way of obtaining an interest in the Redeemer.—Abraham "believed God, and it was counted to him for righteousness." Jacob's faith was strong and vigorous, by which he fully credited the divine declarations, and gladly embraced the promised Saviour. Genuine faith is unchangeably the same, and is essentially connected with the salvation of our souls, John iii. 18, 36. It is a principle of *credence*, *affiance*, and *appropriation*. It is not a mere *opinion* of uncertain speculation, but an *habitual* and *vital* exercise of the mind, by which we are enabled confidently to exclaim, "Lo, this is our God; we have waited for him, and he will save us; this is the Lord; we have waited for him, we will rejoice and be glad in his salvation."

3. *We must wait for salvation importunately.* This primitive patriarch was an eminently devout character. A remarkable instance of this appears when he wrestled with the Lord, and nobly declared, "I will not let thee go, except thou bless me;" and as a mighty prince "he had power with God and prevailed."—Prayer is still indispensably necessary, and uniformly attended with certain success, Psa. xci. 15, 16. It must be sincere, humble, spiritual, fervent, and faithful. By thus *waiting upon* and *for* the Lord, he will assuredly hear our cries, and save us from all our troubles, Psa. xl. 1—3, l. 15.

4. *We must wait for salvation perseveringly.* It must be a patient, continual, and confident expectation of divine mercy, in all the appointed means of grace, and under every vicissitude of human life.—Thus good old Israel, after waiting for the Lord through a long series of years, and having found him a never-failing refuge and portion, he was at last enabled to die triumphantly in the faith, by which he had previously lived, joyfully declaring, "I have waited for thy salvation, O Lord."—"Mark the perfect man, and behold the upright; for the end of that man is peace."

We may learn from this subject the necessity of seeking salvation—the excellency of genuine religion—and the blessedness of "dying in the Lord."

AN INTEREST IN GOD THE MOST EFFECTUAL ANTIDOTE TO FEAR.

Gen. xv. 1. Fear not, Abram, I am thy shield, and thy exceeding great reward. (Sk.)

"THE Lord loveth the righteous." How demonstrable is this consolatory truth! He designates them by the most endearing titles. He confers upon them the most invaluable privileges. He permits them to hold with himself the closest communion. He manifests the most affectionate solicitude, to convince them of the deep interest he takes in their most minute affairs. God's conduct towards Abram abundantly illustrates the verity of these remarks.—The preceding chapter presents the first record of martial contest that has been transmitted to posterity; in which Lot, the nephew of Abram, and all his goods, had fallen into the hands of an unprincipled and ferocious soldiery. The tidings were conveyed to Abram, who most promptly armed his servants, amounting to three hundred and eighteen, and pursued after the conquerors; and, by a most judicious attack, succeeded in defeating them; and what to him was more desirable, in rescuing Lot, and his family, from their hands, and recovering all the spoils. "After these things, the word of the Lord came unto Abram, &c., saying, Fear not, Abram," &c. It would be natural for Abram, thus circumstanced, to fear lest the enemies whom he had routed should rally their forces, and by superior numbers overpower him; the text was therefore to him peculiarly appropriate. We will, in reflecting on it, consider,

1. THE PERSON ADDRESSED. Abram—a character rendered memorable for Faith—Prayer—Hospitality—and Obedience.

1. *Abram was a man of genuine faith.* The faith of Abram was *divine* in its object, "he believed God," Rom. iv. 3. *Unshaken* in its exercise, his faith was tried, Heb. xi. 17; but he staggered not, Rom. iv. 20. *Operative* in its principle, Heb. xi. 18. *Realizing* in its prospect, "he looked for a city," Heb. xi. 16. He is termed "faithful Abram."

2. *Of importunate prayer.* Witness the intercessions which he urged on behalf of Sodom. In these we perceive *feelings of profound self-abasement of soul*, "I am but dust and ashes." Gen. xviii. 27. *Sympathies of deep commiseration.* He saw the terrible storm of indignation ready to burst on Sodom. *Appeals repeatedly urged on the Divine Being.* "I will speak yet but this once," Gen. xviii. 32. But *principles of perfect submission.* Not a murmur of discontent is heard.

3. *Of cordial hospitality.* See Gen. xviii. 2—7. Kindness to strangers is highly commendable. The accommodations now provided for travellers were in the days of Abram unknown: but even in the apostolic age hospitality was deemed a praiseworthy virtue, Rom. xii. 13; Heb. xiii. 2; 1 Pet. iv. 9.

4. *Of uniform obedience.* His personal piety secured to him the high encomium of a "Friend of God." In reference to his domestic arrangements, the Lord declared, "I know him that he will command his children," &c., Gen. xviii. 19. And as to his general character, by works was his faith made perfect, Jam. ii. 22.

II. THE ADMONITORY PROHIBITION URGED. "Fear not, Abram." This prohibition cannot be designed to suppress the passion of fear; a passion common to human nature, and in our present state as necessary as it is common. Nor was it intended to divest Abram of that cautionary mode of conduct, which provides for safety in the time of danger. Much less are we to imagine that the prohibition includes that holy, reverential awe of the Divine

Being, which should be deeply fixed in our minds, Prov. xxiii. 17, xxviii. 14. But the fear prohibited is the apprehension of evil, attended with that uneasiness, anxiety, and torment, which are its usual concomitants.

1. *There is a fear of persecution.* The revilings of men, and the fines, penalties, and punishments which have been inflicted upon the righteous in various ages, have produced in their minds feelings of deep anxiety. Our Lord sought to arm his disciples against this kind of fear, Luke xii. 4. God said to Abram, "Fear not."

2. *There is a fear of poverty.* The disciples of Christ are chiefly "the poor of this world," Jam. ii. 5. Want often stares them in the face, and their fears are frequently excited, lest they should be deprived of the bread that perisheth, see Luke xii. 22—30. How far Abram was subject to this fear it is impossible to determine. In the early periods of the world commerce was unknown—the luxuries of life were few—famines were frequent and want prevailed to an alarming degree. Abram sojourned in a strange land, and might have been deprived of the common necessaries of life.

3. *There is the fear of pain.* Suffering is man's inevitable lot. The human body in its tendency to dissolution necessarily suffers, and where is the individual that has not indulged a painful presentiment in reference to the pain of dying? God said to Abram, "Fear not," Rev. ii. 10.

III. THE ENCOURAGING ASSURANCE ANNEXED. "I am thy shield," &c. This was designed as an antidote to fear. The shield anciently was a piece of defensive armor, usually composed of wood covered with leather, sometimes overlaid with plates of gold or brass.—The use of the shield was to defend the body against the darts of the enemy. God was Abram's defence, and he has been the defence of his people in all ages.

1. *He defends their persons.* Their *bodies*.—See Daniel in the den of lions; the Hebrew children in the fiery furnace; Paul when suffering shipwreck. Their *souls* in temptation.—"There hath no temptation taken you," &c., 1 Cor. x. 13; 2 Pet. ii. 9. From the power of evil. "The Lord shall preserve thee from evil," Ps. cxxi. 7; John xvii. 15.

2. *He protects their substance.* "Hast thou not made a hedge about him?" &c., Job. i. 10; "There shall no evil befall thee," &c., Ps. xci. 10. If God be our shield, our defence is *certain*; "The Almighty shall be thy defence," &c., Job xxii. 25; "My defence is of God," Ps. vii. 19, lix. 9. Our defence is *universal*.—The shields of the people defended one part of the body only. God defends his people as the hen doth her brood, Luke xiii. 34. "He shall cover thee with his feathers," Ps. xci. 4. *Constant*.—The earthly warrior may be divested of his shield; God will never leave his people. "He that keepeth Israel," &c., Ps. cxxi. 4.

3. *God is the reward of his people.* The king of Sodom had offered Abram rewards for interposing in his behalf; these he had rejected, saying that he would not even take a thread, Gen. xiv. 23. But God promises Abram that *he* will be his reward; *He is the author of his people's reward*. Their reward is not wages for service performed; but recompense freely and graciously given; infinitely surpassing all their claims, on the ground of any supposed worthiness; *He is the giver of their reward*; "the rewarder of them," &c., Heb. xi. 6. He appoints their kingdom, gives them their crown, places them on their throne, &c., Luke xxii. 29; Rev. ii. 10, iii. 21. *He is the object of their reward*. It is not their wonderful escape from perdition, nor the splendor of heaven, nor the society of angels, that will constitute their reward; but it is the possession of God, the light of his countenance, the consciousness of his love, and the enjoyment of his nature:

hence God is their portion and their heritage, and they are heirs of God. He is their *exceeding* great reward; exceeding all earthly rewards in the dignity of its origin—the vastness of its nature—the certainty of its communication—the felicity of its possession—and the perpetuity of its existence.

From the subject we learn,

1. *The security and safety of God's people.* God is their shield: they live in a world of enemies, and are surrounded by dangers, seen and unseen; but “the name of the Lord is a strong tower, the righteous runneth into it, and is safe.”

2. *Their tranquility and happiness.* God is their reward; perhaps they have little to expect in this world but painful exercises; but their all is treasured up in God; and from his bounty and benevolence they cannot expect too much.

3. *The fearless confidence with which they should be inspired.* What can they fear, while God is their shield and their *exceeding great reward*? shall they fear tribulation, or distress, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? “Nay, in all these things, they are more than conquerors through him that hath loved them.”

ON PATIENCE.

Tim. vi. 11.—Follow after patience. (H.)

AMONG all the graces that adorn the soul of a christian, like so many jewels of various colors and lustres, there is not one more brilliant than this of patience: not one that brings more glory to God, or contributes so much towards making and keeping peace on earth; not one which renders a christian more happy within himself, or more agreeable to all about him. Even they who themselves possess it not, are sure to commend it in others. They set their seal to the truth, though by so doing they condemn their own practice. Consider,

I. THE NATURE OF PATIENCE.

Patience is a holy behaviour in affliction: it is not an insensibleness of present evils, nor an indifference to future good—“no affliction for the present is joyous.” Our Lord himself was sensible of his sufferings, nor should we be coldly affected to the blessings for which God has caused us to hope; that would be a reflection on the excellency of the blessings—would make us negligent in our endeavors to obtain them.

Christian patience is a disposition that keeps us calm and composed in our minds, and steady in the practice of our duty, under the sense of our afflictions, or the delay of our hopes. It is sometimes called long-suffering, or, a length of mind. It is directly opposite to hastiness of spirit.

1. Patience secures the possession of our souls in every circumstance that tends to discompose our minds. Patience is a soul enjoying itself in every condition, an even sea in all winds; a serene soul in all weathers; a thread even spun with every wheel of Providence. Our Lord exhorts his disciples, when he had foretold the sufferings and dangers to which they would be exposed, “In patience possess ye your souls.” Smart trials, or the deferring of our hopes, are apt to make our hearts sick; patience guards the soul, and keeps it sedate and sober under every affliction.

2. Patience prevents hasty and rash conclusions, either from present trouble, or the suspension of desired good. We are prone to make hasty conclusions from present appearances, and to charge the Lord foolishly: 'to question the truth of his promises, if they are not accomplished in our way and time; or to suspect his mercy and goodness, because afflictions are our present lot. *Psa. lxxvii. 7—9.* Patience disposeth us to rest in God; I reckon the sufferings—"He who hath delivered, and doth deliver, will yet deliver." 'The patient soul is neither without tears, nor without hope; neither over sensible, nor under sensible; affected with all, cast down with nothing: quiet when tossed, very quiet when extremely tossed; expecting his salvation from God, when none can be had from man. "Though he slay me." Patience is a soul at rest in God; substance gone, Zigzag burnt, all mourning, many murmuring—stoning—David makes up all in God. *1 Sam. xxx. 1—6.*

3. Patience will fortify against any unlawful methods for accomplishing our deliverance or desires: the impatient endeavor by any means to obtain their wishes.—When the Philistines were coming against Saul with a formidable army, and his own people were much discouraged, he would not wait for deliverance in God's time and way. *1 Sam. xiii. 5, 14.* Patience restrains from unlawful expedients; "He that believeth shall not make haste"—"The Lord will provide," is the language of patience under the greatest sufferings.

4. Patience disposes the soul to perseverance in the way of duty, whatever discouragements may arise from the pressure of afflictions, or the deferring of hopes. 'This is the most essential part of patience, to persevere in our christian course, whether afflictions attend us, or whatever it may cost us. The impatient are apt to "faint and weary in their minds," and grow remiss: "but the righteous shall hold on his way;" hence we are exhorted to "run with patience the race that is set before us."

III. ENDEAVOR TO RECOMMEND THIS GRACE TO YOUR ESTEEM, AND EXCITE YOU TO THE ATTAINMENT OF IT.

1. Patience is a virtue common to us with God. Long-suffering is his darling attribute; and what is dear in his sight, ought to be no less precious in ours. And how marvellous is his patience, who daily pours his blessings on those who as daily offend, affront, and dishonor him! "he makes his sun to rise on the evil and on the good;" he does not exclude the worst of us from those blessings, to which the best of us have no title. For the benefit of the impious as well as the pious, the ungrateful as well as the grateful, the seasons take their rounds, the elements work together, the light and heat exert their friendly influence, the fountains send forth their salutary streams, and the pastures flourish. The gospel is still preached to those who slight it; the cup of salvation is still held forth to those who have so often dashed it from them; and although God be provoked every day, he holds his hand, and waiteth to be gracious—although he have the power in his own hands, and the weapons of his indignation are all ready, he defers to strike; and while judgments sleep, mercy calls night and day to sinners, "Why will you die?" His truth is denied; his Son crucified; and his long-suffering is made an argument against his existence; and he is still patient, "What is man, then, that he should complain?"

2. The patience which we so much admire in God, shone forth yet more amazingly in the person of his Son. Was ever patience like that patience, which descended from a throne of glory, bore a long imprisonment in the womb, to sanctify sinners; and lay in a stable to bring them to a kingdom!

Behold the Master baptized by his servant; and, with his disciples, he lived not as their Lord, but as the servant of all. How tenderly did he bear with their ignorance and infirmities, leading them gently as they were able to follow him; how patiently did he bear the contradiction of sinners, how was he wounded, who heals every disease, how was he fed with gall and wormwood, who reaches out to his people the fruits of paradise and the cup of salvation; and, at his crucifixion, when the heavens were confounded, and the earth trembled, "He opened not his mouth;" he endured without murmuring all that earth and hell could inflict, till he had put the last stroke to the most finished picture of perfect patience, and prayed for his murderers.

3. The patience thus practised by Christ is enjoined by his gospel, being indeed the badge of that gospel and its professors; "Ye have heard," says our Lord. Matt. v. 43. "Follow after patience"—"In patience." 1 Pet. ii. 21—23.

4. We find all the saints of God, who have been eminent for their faith in Christ, to have been as eminent for their patience, without which their faith must have failed in the day of trial: it being not through faith alone, but "through faith and patience," that they "inherited the promises." Faith begat patience, which, like a dutiful child, proved the support of its parent. Patience preserved Noah's faith all the time the ark was building and while it floated on the waters; through patience Abraham endured the severest trial that ever faith was put to; through patience, Jacob, persecuted by his brother, left his father's house; through patience, Joseph endured and forgave the ill treatment of his brethren; through patience, Moses, so often abused and insulted by a stiff-necked people, still entreated the Lord for them; through patience, David would not slay his implacable enemy, Saul; through patience, Job endured the loss of all things. We are compassed about with a cloud of witnesses, who, through the patience of Jesus Christ, "wandered about in sheep-skins." Heb. xi. 37, 38.

5. The present state of man renders the practice of this virtue absolutely necessary, if we would enjoy any happiness here or hereafter. Could we live in the world without sufferings, then were there no need of patience. But thus runs the sentence, Gen. iii. 17, "Cursed is the ground." Every man, from him that sitteth on a throne, to the man that lieth in a dungeon, must have labor and sorrow; and tribulation admits of no remedy but patience. The christian has need of patience—for "he that endureth to the end shall be saved." Wo unto you that have lost patience; and what shall ye do when the Lord shall visit you! Patience is the only armor that is proof against all assaults, and he who has it well buckled on, needeth not to fear any adversary.

6. And lastly, let me set before you, in one view, the incomparable excellences and advantages of this lovely grace. Patience commends us to God, and keep us his; patience is the guardian of faith, the preserver of peace, the cherisher of love, the teacher of humility; patience governs the flesh, strengthens the spirit, sweetens the temper, stifles anger, extinguishes envy, subdues pride; she bridles the tongue, restrains the hand, tramples on temptation, endures persecutions; patience produces unity in churches, and harmony in families; she comforts the poor, and moderates the rich; she makes us humble in prosperity, and cheerful in adversity; she teaches us to forgive those who have injured us, and to be the first in asking forgiveness of those we may have injured.

If, therefore, to be like unto God; if to be conformed to the image of Christ; if to follow the precepts of the gospel; if to write after the copy

of the saints; if to render our present state comfortable, and ensure our final salvation; if to enjoy the incomparable excellences and advantages of patience: if these things are desirable, let us from henceforth give ourselves to the pursuit of this virtue, let us "follow after patience." And for this purpose let us adore and emulate the long-suffering of our God; let us contemplate and transcribe into our practice the patience of Jesus Christ; let us study and fulfil the precepts of the gospel; let us look at and emulate the examples of the saints; let us consider and alleviate the sorrows of our pilgrimage; let us seek until we obtain the heavenly grace of patience, with all her benefits and blessings conferred on her by Jesus Christ; into whose patience the Lord direct our hearts, until she have her perfect work in the salvation of our souls through the same. Amen.

CHRISTIAN FORTITUDE.

2 Pet. i. 5.—Add to your faith virtue. (H.)

THE apostle supposes those to whom he wrote to have obtained like precious faith with him and the other apostles, ver. 1, *i. e.* to believe the gospel as well as they. He proceeds to exhort them to give all diligence in building a proper superstructure upon their belief of the gospel. That which he recommends consists of seven important articles. The first mentioned, and which he immediately connects with faith, is virtue. "Giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue."

Some would understand virtue in a general sense for a universal regularity of mind and manners, or a disposition to all virtuous actions.—I take the word virtue in a more limited sense here, to mean the particular disposition of christian fortitude. What could more naturally be pressed upon us after faith, or a belief of the gospel, than courage in the profession of it, and in a practice correspondent to it? And what could more aptly follow upon this, than that we should add to our virtue, or courage, knowledge? or a growing acquaintance with the doctrines and duties contained in the rule of our faith, that our courage and resolution may not be ill-placed?

I. EXPLAIN THE NATURE OF CHRISTIAN COURAGE, OR FORTITUDE.

Courage, in general, is a temper which disposes man to do brave and commendable actions, without being daunted at the appearance of dangers and difficulties in the way. The christian life being a warfare, gives the principal occasion and opportunity to show christian courage. It is nothing else but to behave as "good soldiers of Jesus Christ." 2 Tim. ii. 3.

To explain it more particularly, it will be proper to shew,

1. For what it is to be exercised. For the cause makes it a christian grace. It is courage in Christ's cause; that is in maintaining the profession of the christian faith, and adhering to the practice of our duty, as far as we are convinced of the mind of God. 1 Tim. i. 18, 19.

But it must necessarily be presupposed, that we are careful to inform ourselves well about the mind and will of God, relating both to faith and practice, that our courage may not be blind and rash, without a good foundation to support it.

And, indeed, without such diligent inquiries, we are hardly like to be courageous in an hour of trial, whatsoever resolutions we may seem to have, while difficulties are at a distance.

2. Against what christian courage is to be exercised. It supposes oppositions, trials, and dangers in our way : else there would be no occasion for it. It is a temper, for which there will be no room in heaven ; and the need of it now ariseth from our present condition, as in a state of conflict.

1st. The power, the subtilty, and activity of the powers of darkness, call for courage in a christian. Upon this the apostle founds an exhortation to be strong, or courageous. Eph. vi. 10, 12.

2dly. The oppositions from within ourselves require courage. Our own irregular inclinations and affections and passions are difficult to be overcome.

3dly. The several discouragements or dangers we may meet with from other men, in the way of our duty, and even for our duty, make courage necessary. Solomon tells us, "that the fear of man bringeth a snare." Prov. xxix. 25. Courage is to overcome this snare. Acts xx. 24.

3. Wherein, or in what acts and instances it should express itself.

Insensibleness of difficulties or dangers is not a proper expression of it. It is not expected of a christian that his apprehension of these things should be less quick than other people's, or that he should have no natural reluctancy to them. Without that, there would be no trial of his courage. Nor are we to expose ourselves unnecessarily to dangers. We should exercise courage in conjunction with christian prudence, though it ought not to be under the restraints of carnal policy. It would rather be imprudence than duty, to act, in time of persecution, as some primitive christians did, who ran uncalled to the heathen tribunals, and cried, "I am a christian," on purpose that they might obtain the honor and reward of martyrdom. It is delivered as an ordinary rule by Christ himself to his disciples, when he foretells the persecutions that would await them. Matt. x. 23. Though circumstances may sometimes vary the case, and make even this inconsistent with duty. Nehemiah was so situated. Neh. vi. 11. Christian courage is to exert itself in such ways as these :

1st. In deliberate and vigorous resolutions for God and our duty, upon counting the cost. This is all that can be done, when difficulties and dangers are not actually present ; seriously to consider them, and, upon balancing matters, to determine for a firm adherence to our Master, whatever it may cost us. Luke xiv. 26—30. The same thing Barnabas inculcated upon the church of Antioch. Acts xi. 23. Such a noble ardour in Paul was a bright part of his character. Acts xxi. 13.

2dly. In the suppression of distracting fear of evils at a distance. The coward often fears where no fear is ; and, as well as the slothful man, creates to himself many imaginary dangers. Prov. xxii. 13. The brave soldier of Christ does not anxiously take thought about the morrow, but leaves future events to God's ordering. Psal. cxii. 7, 8.

3dly. In a vigorous application to our christian work, notwithstanding the stated and constant difficulties and oppositions attending it. Though Satan would hinder, and the world ensnare, and a corrupt heart resist, a courageous christian goes on as one resolved to conquer or die ; striving to enter in at the strait gate. Luke xiii. 24 ; Matt. xi. 12.

4thly. In readiness to undertake hard and difficult services, when God calls to them. Such as may be eminently for the honor of God or the advantage of our generation, though we may foresee few to help us. Psal. xciv.

16. Or when duty obliges us to go upon an ungrateful errand. *Isa. vi. 8.* And especially when visible dangers await us, not to decline a service of which we are capable. *Heb. xi. 27.*

5thly. In a uniform steadiness of conduct under all the trials we actually meet with. It is no great expression of courage in common life, to talk big when dangers are remote, though he should meet suffering with a trembling heart; yet, if he stands his ground in the hour of temptation, he has the truest courage. As it has been observed of some of the bravest soldiers, they have come with a trembling hand into the battle, but when once engaged have done wonders.

II. WHAT MAY BE INTENDED IN THE EXHORTATION TO ADD VIRTUE, OR COURAGE, TO OUR FAITH.

This may intimate the imperfection of our faith, without this superstructure upon it. It is necessary to be added to our faith, in order to our acceptance with God. *Rom. x. 9.* Faith is dead, if it produce not a corresponding profession and course of action.

But that which I principally apprehend to be designed is, to intimate the just reason which our faith gives for christian courage. Christian faith is most fit to inspire with christian fortitude. For instance,

1. Faith discovers divine Providence as engaged for us, and with us, in all our difficulties. God frequently animated his servants under the Old Testament in hard services, by an assurance of his presence: *Gen. xxvi. 24; Isa. xli. 10; Dan. iii. 17;* like the Jewish nurses in Egypt, these were not afraid of the king's commandment. Faith will support us in the greatest dangers by this reasoning, "If God be for us, who can be against us?" *Heb. xiii. 5, 6; 1 John iv. 4.*

2. Faith proposes the divine Spirit, as directly provided to help our infirmities. Particularly for this very purpose, to inspire us with needful courage *Eph. iii. 16.* Agreeable to that ancient promise. *Psa. xxvii. 14.*

3. Faith represents our main enemies as already vanquished, and as having their chief power broken. The Captain of our salvation hath personally overcome them, and as the head of his church too. *Col. ii. 15; John xvi. 33.* Hence the intention of God in sending his Son, is represented to be, "that we should be saved from our enemies." *Luke i. 71, and ver. 74, 75.*

4. Faith gives us particular assurance, that our trials shall not exceed our strength; either the strength we have, or that which shall be imparted. *1 Cor. x. 13.*

5. Faith sets in view greater evils to be feared from our cowardice, than can be feared from our adherence to God. Christ elegantly sets these the one over against the other. *Luke xii. 4, 5; Heb. x. 38, 39.* And the fearful, who choose always to be in the rear in danger, stand in the front of those who "shall have their part in the second death." *Rev. xxi. 8.* One would think this necessity, and the impossibility of escaping without it, should make even a coward to fight.

6. Faith assures us of the certain and glorious success of our courage. That our endeavors against our powerful enemies shall issue in a full conquest. *Rom. xvi. 20.* And though now a saint, after all his struggles, may have frequent occasion to mourn over the body of death, he may be assured that God "will deliver him from it, through Jesus Christ our Lord." *Rom. vii. 24, 25.* "And death itself, the last enemy, shall be destroyed." *1 Cor. xv. 26.* And unspeakable rewards shall be the prize of the conquerors. We strive for mastery, not as uncertain what we are to obtain by it, but for an incorruptible crown. *1 Cor. ix. 25, 26; xv. 58.*

7. Faith represents to us the noblest examples of such holy fortitude upon the same principle: all the excellent of the earth, particularly that noble collection of worthies, whose brave exploits are recorded in Heb. xi. The glorious apostle Paul himself; and, above all, the Captain of our salvation, who was an illustrious pattern of invincible courage in his work: he feared the face of no man in the course of his ministry, but boldly reprov'd sin and sinners. His enemies could not help owning it. Matt. xxii. 16; John vii. 25, 26. Consider him, that endured such contradiction of sinners against himself, lest ye be wearied and faint in your minds. Heb. xii. 2, 3.

Upon the whole,

1. Consider this grace of fortitude as a matter of the utmost importance in the christian life. The variety of oppositions and difficulties in our way make it necessary. We shall never make any considerable progress in the divine life without it, nor ever do much for God or our generation. 2 Tim. i. 7.

2. Cultivate therefore your faith, in order to the forming of your minds to holy fortitude. Frequently contemplate the establishing motives of the gospel, which are so full and apposite; and by prayer and frequent reviews of the grounds of your faith, endeavor to confirm your hope in the gospel.

3. Use all farther additional means to fortify your minds. Be prepared for the worst, by counting frequently the cost. Make clear the goodness of your case, for which you may be called to exert your courage. Make sure of the goodness of your state, and carefully exercise a good conscience

THE PRESENCE OF CHRIST THE HAPPINESS OF THE SAINTS.

Psalm xvi. 11.—Thou wilt show me the path of life. In thy presence is fulness of joy, &c. (H.)

THESE words originally belong to Christ, being applied by David to him, in the spirit of prophecy, as will evidently appear from the connexion in which they stand. They are also applicable to the real Christian, and are expressive of the happiness and joy he expects in a future state. Joy is the soul's rest and satisfaction in the enjoyment of a suitable good. Such as the good and enjoyment are, such will be the joy. The most perfect enjoyment of the most perfect good, must, therefore, cause the most perfect joy. Such is the joy of the blessed in heaven. It consists in being in Christ's immediate presence, and partaking of that fulness of joy, and those pleasures which are at his right hand for evermore.

Consider,

I. THE CHARACTER OF THOSE WHO SHALL BE THUS BLESSED: they are such as,

1. Repent of their sins, and are converted: who cease to do evil and learn to do well. Upon these the times of refreshing shall come from the presence of the Lord. Acts iii. 19.

2. Believe in Christ, with a divine, practical, purifying faith. Rev. vii. 14, 15.

3. Upright in their profession and performance of commanded duties, both to God and man. Ps. cix. 13.

4. His servants, who follow him as their Lord and Master, and his imitable life as their copy and pattern. John xii. 26.

5. To conclude this head, if any require, as the Psalmist did, who shall ascend into the hill of the Lord? I answer as he did; he that hath clean hands, &c. Ps. xxiv. 3, 4.

II. WHEREIN THEIR BLESSEDNESS CONSISTS; and according to the text, it is occasioned, by being in the presence of God; and by that fulness of joy and pleasure, which are at his right hand.

The presence of God here spoken of, is

1. The presence of his glory, the most conspicuous lustre of his excellencies, or his perfections shining in the highest excellency of their brightness. Jude 24.

2. The presence of his face, as it is in the original text; "In thy face, or being before thy face, is fulness of joy." The presence of his glory, which is hidden here, will be unveiled in heaven, and presented openly to view, without veil or shadow. 1 Pet. iv. 13. For we shall see him face to face, &c. 1 Cor. xiii. 12.

3. His immediate presence; no longer manifested through obscuring mediums; here we have his presence in creatures, in providences, and in ordinances; but in heaven we shall enjoy him immediately, and without the intervention of means. Rev. xxi. 22, 23; xxii. 5.

4. His countenancing presence, so the apostle explains the text. Acts ii. 28. It is his presence as a pleased friend, father, and husband. To these he gives the presence of his pleased face, without a frown, and the light of his countenance without an intervening cloud. As his anger kindleth hell, so his favor, the light and smiles of his countenance, make heaven, see Rev. xxi. 3, compared with Zeph. iii. 17.

5. His fixed and abiding presence: we shall be forever with him, and he shall dwell among us. Rev. vii. 17.

6. His influxive and efficacious presence: a glimpse of it made the face of Moses shine. As it is reflected in the glass of the gospel; it changeth them that behold it into the same image from glory to glory; much more will it change you, who shall stand before his face in heaven, into the most perfect likeness of him in holiness and happiness your natures are capable of. 1 John iii. 2.

Their happiness is also occasioned by those joys and pleasures which are at God's right hand. Heaven is a situation of joy and pleasure, very different from our present situation, which is a state of tribulation and distress. John xvi. 33. The joy and pleasures of the heavenly world are,

1. Spiritual and heavenly. Not carnal or earthly. Our bodies shall be spiritual, so far, as not to need any of these supports and refreshments they do now. There will be no need of sleep, of meat and drink, of marrying and giving in marriage; but we shall be as the angels of God in heaven. Matt. xii. 25; 1 Cor. vi. 13. The more noble senses of seeing and hearing, the pleasure of which is mixed with reason, shall subsist, be spiritualized, and eternally satisfied with glorified objects, the chief of which shall be the glorified body of the Son of God. It is the joy of the Lord the saints enter into, the same for kind, though not for degree.

2. Pure, without mixture. Here there is a mixture of good and evil. Heaven and hell are the extremes. Hell is a place of animated torment, heaven of unmixed joy: no sin there: no temptation or occasion of sinning: no serpent hissing in that paradise: all sorrow and cause of sorrow shall be done away. Rev. vii. 16; xxi. 4.

3. A multitude without number. There is not only a removal of every evil, but the presence and enjoyment of every good. The blessedness of heaven is resembled by every real good known to us here, all the glory and honor of the kings of the earth shall be there. Rev. xxi. 24—26. God who is an infinite and universal good, will feast his saints with fresh discoveries and communications of delight and wonder. Isa. lx. 19.

4. Full without any want. There every one shall enjoy a whole heaven, with all the felicities of it, and are blessed in every part in soul and body! all our wants shall be supplied, and our desires satisfied. Ps. xvii. 15.

5. Constant without diminution or interruption. Here our best enjoyments are often changeable and interrupted: but the joys of heaven shall never fade away. 1 Pet. i. 3, 4. God who is the source of their happiness remains unchangeably the same. The saints are fixed in his presence, and their happiness shall not be diminished on account of their number; as in nature, every man hath a sun to himself, the same as if there were but one man in the world. Nor will it be diminished on account of the length of the enjoyment; for the divine presence is an eternal spring of pleasure. Psalms xxxvi. 9.

6. Perpetual. They are pleasures for evermore; all the felicities of heaven are everlasting; everlasting consolation, everlasting joy, everlasting habitations, everlasting life. It is this that maketh heaven to be heaven indeed; all its pleasures would be imperfect without it. It is an exceeding and eternal weight of glory. 2 Cor. iv. 17.

Improvement.

1. Hence see the folly and madness of those who seek their portion in this life; in carnal and sensual gratifications; dreadful will be their state at last. Ps. xcvi. 3; Matt. xxv. 41.

2. Let such glorious views and expectations comfort the heirs of glory in the midst of all their tribulations. 2 Cor. iv. 17.

3. Let it excite all such to diligence and activity in the ways of God. This is the very use the apostle makes of this doctrine. 1 Cor. xv. 58; Heb. xii. 1, 2.

THE CHRISTIAN'S DESIRE TO SEE GOD'S GLORY.

Exod. xxxiii. 18.—And he said, I beseech thee show me thy glory. (H.)

THESE are the words of Moses, a man singularly favored of God, by the manifestation of himself he made to him; and still desiring to be more so, here expresses that desire in prayer to him. Perhaps he might desire too much; more than he in his present state could bear; and so far his request was denied, ver. 22. The request that Moses here makes, as duly regulated, is graciously answered, ver. 23. "By his goodness, is there meant his glory; as the LXX render it, 'I will pass before thee with my glory;' thou shalt have a transient view of it, but the full discovery is reserved for a future state: and how this matter was to be conducted, see in verses 21, &c. Doubtless, a great deal of God, and his goodness, is to be seen and known upon earth; but far, very far short of what will be enjoyed in heaven; and the more of his goodness we experience here, the more insatiable is our desire after more.

By divine assistance, I shall consider,

I. WHAT IS MEANT BY GOD'S GLORY, WHICH THE CHRISTIAN DESIRES TO SEE.

1. It is glory, in his gracious conduct to sinners, in and through his Son. Any other discovery of God would be dreadful and terrifying, and instead of desiring it he would deprecate it. "God is a consuming fire," and, as such, inaccessible without Christ. 1 Tim. vi. 16. But Jesus has revealed him in the most amiable and endearing manner; John i. 18. in this way his glorious goodness is abundant. Ex. xxxiv. 6. It is in his wounds that we are secured from flaming wrath. Through him it is, that the glory of God shines, not with a destroying, but reviving light; and only as standing within this rock, we are able with comfort to behold it.

2. It is his glory, as manifested to his soul in pardoning mercy and love. It is pleasing to the Christian, to see the glory of God's goodness, in reconciling the world to himself by the death of his Son; 2 Cor. v. 19. but much more satisfactory for him to see the glory of God, as revealed to his own soul, so as to be able to say with Paul, "In whom we have redemption," &c. Eph. i. 7. This is his abundant goodness, as expressed chap. xxiv. 7. It is called the secret of the Lord. Job xxix. 4; Prov. iii. 32.

3. It is his glory, as manifested to the soul, making him a partaker of the divine nature. 2 Pet. i. 4. Improving and increasing; 2 Cor. iii. 18. this is called the mind of Christ; Phil. ii. 5. and the Spirit of Christ. Rom. vii. 9. It is called the beauty of the saints; Ps. xlv. 11. and it is that salvation with which God beautifies the meek; Ps. cxlix. 4. and by which they are prepared to see his glory in heaven. Matt. v. 9.

II. WHERE DOES THE REAL CHRISTIAN WISH TO SEE THE GLORY OF GOD.

1. In all his ordinances in this world, especially in the assembly of his saints. There God has promised to be. Ex. xx. 24. There he gives the most glorious communications of himself; and after these the Psalmist expresses the most vehement desire. Ps. xlii. 1, 2. He there alludes to the assemblies of his people, as he explains it. Ps. xxvii. 4.; and again Ps. lxxiii. 1, 2. How much of the glory of his perfections are seen in his sanctuary? particularly in prayer and praise, when the hearts of his saints are warmed, enlarged, and raised to himself, while he supplies them with fresh strength, life, and comfort. And when his word is read, opened, and applied, what impressions are made? what effects are produced? How much of his glory has been displayed in this way?

But the glory of God, in his perfections, eminently shines in the ordinance of the Lord's supper; where Jesus Christ is eminently set forth as crucified before our eyes, suffering, bleeding, and dying, in our room and stead.

2. Much of God's glory is here to be seen. The glory of his wisdom, in devising the wonderful scheme of man's redemption, so as the seeming contrary pleas of his attributes might be adjusted, sin punished, the law magnified and made honourable, and yet the rebel pardoned. And when none else could, God himself found a ransom, appointing his own Son, in our nature, by dying, to become our Saviour; "Wherein," &c. Eph. i. 8. And seeing this, in the commemoration of his death, believers have been made to cry out, "O! the depth," &c. Rom. ii. 33.

3. How glorious is the discovery here made of his justice and holiness, in the satisfaction made for sin by the voluntary death even of God's own beloved Son to make way for sinners being pardoned and saved. And, considering who he was, and what he bare, and how he was treated, that we might be spared the ruin of the offending angels, the drowning of the old

world, the burning of Sodom, and the punishment of sinners in hell for ever, do not altogether show forth the justice and holiness of God, like the sufferings and death of Christ, on the account of lost sinners.

4. Here divine grace is to be seen in its brightest lustre. In its freeness, without our merit, and against the highest provocation. In its condescension, in resolving to save us, however unworthy. In its sovereignty, passing by angels, and providing a Saviour for man. In its riches, as extending to all mankind. John iii. 16.

5. Here is displayed the glory of God's faithfulness to his promises; in his being present in his ordinances, giving his people fresh light, strength, and comfort; and thus, in a sensible way, renewing his covenant with them, and assuring them, that all the blessing of it are theirs.

6. The Christian desires to see the glory of God above. Phil. i. 23. 2 Cor. v. 1, 2. The glory of the Lord sometimes fills his house, and his ordinances here below, which believers are admitted to see to their comfort and joy; but this is only preparatory to the inconceivably greater displays that will be made in heaven, which they expect, and earnestly desire. 1 John iii. 2; 1 Cor. xiii. 12.

III. WHY DOES THE CHRISTIAN DESIRE TO SEE HIS GLORY?

He desires to see it in his ordinances here,

1. Because the glory of God is transforming. The more he sees God in the manner described, the more he shall be like him. Some rays, as it were, were left upon him; and the disciples were so much raised above themselves, that it was remarked, "they have been with Jesus." Acts iv. 13.

2. The glory of God, thus shown to the Christian, is most reviving. Not any thing in this world can give that comfort to the soul, which the manifestation of God can do. Ps. iv. 7.

And the Christian wishes to see this glory in heaven,

1. Because it will be most clear and full. The manifestations which God will make of himself above, if communicated here, would dissolve our present frame; we could not see his face and live. Here, "his loving kindness is better than life." What then will it be when manifested in heaven?

2. The glory to be revealed above will be most satisfying. It is called a fulness of joy, and pleasures for ever; Ps. xvi. 11. and this David speaks of, as what he desired above every other thing. Ps. xvii. 15.

3. The manifestations of this glory in heaven, will be permanent and everlasting. The glory of God will be eternally open, and the saints shall eternally behold it, and that with the highest delight, without interruption, and without end.

Lastly, let us pray for it. And thus express our desires after it, for desire is the very life and soul of prayer: and those desires should be expressed to God who alone can show us his glory. And those desires should be expressed, especially in the assemblies of the saints, and with uncommon vehemence of desire, saying, "O Lord, I beseech thee, show me thy glory." And thus we shall express the high value we put upon it, and may reasonably expect a favorable answer. And to our prayers for clear manifestations of his glory, let us add our praises for those which we have already received; and thus begin the work of heaven while we are upon earth, in the hope of dwelling with God in heaven, to behold his glory for ever.

HONOUR AND PRIVILEGE OF THE SAINTS.

Psalm. iv. 3.—But know that the Lord hath set apart him that is godly for himself. (Pr.)

David's greatest troubles were on account of his religion, though he was not without trouble in other respects.— — —He was persecuted for his piety; and his elevation to the throne of Israel raised him up many enemies who were inclined to dispute his right.— — —But he intimates that he did not usurp the government: it was God that anointed him king over Israel, and who set him apart for that purpose.— — —In vindicating his own claims, he asserts the honour and the privilege of all the saints—that God hath set them apart for himself.

Let us notice the character here given of the saints—and the privilege with which it is connected.

I. ILLUSTRATE THE CHARACTER IN THE TEXT, OR INQUIRE WHAT IT IS TO BE TRULY "GODLY."

Godliness is that which immediately relates to God: it has him for its object, and in it we are made partakers of a divine nature.

True religion is by the apostle distributed into three parts, corresponding with the precepts of the moral law, which requires us to love God, our neighbors, and ourselves. **Tit. ii. 12.** 'To live "soberly,"' concerns ourselves, and consists in the government of the passions.— — —To live "righteously,"' respects our conduct towards others, and consists in our doing to them as we should wish they would do unto us. 'To live "godly,"' refers to our conduct towards God, and consists in making him the object of our veneration.— — —The two former may exist without the latter, but the latter cannot be without the former.

More particularly,

1. To be godly is to be like God— — —to imitate his moral character, and to bear a resemblance to it— — —to think, and act, and feel, in some measure, as he does— — —to be of one mind with him, in the great principles of moral government.— — —God is necessarily the friend of holiness, and the enemy of sin; to be godly is to be the same, according to our measure, hating the evil and choosing the good.— — —God is infinitely kind and merciful; he is good to all, and his tender mercies are over all his works: and it is essential to true godliness that we be pitiful, kind and courteous, full of compassion, and gracious. **Psa. cxii. 4. Matt. v. 44, 45. James i. 27.** — — —God also is ready to forgive, slow to anger, and abundant in goodness and in truth: to be godly is to be like him, and to possess the same spirit.

2. To be truly godly is to live in the fear of God— — —to walk as in his sight— — —to have a special regard to his presence— — —seeking his approbation in all things.— — —Not only to conduct ourselves wisely before men, but to walk before the Lord with a perfect heart. Hence that command to Abraham, **Gen. xvii. 1**, and this only is true religion.

2. Godliness consists in making the will of God the rule of our life, the reason and motive of our obedience.— — —It is not merely what we do in religion, but why we do it, that makes it acceptable in the sight of God. If we read, or hear, or pray, and do all this from custom, or the force of example only, it is not godliness.— — —We may abound in religious observances; but if we have no regard to the will of God, it is no better than will-worship.— — —Hence that serious interrogation: "Did ye do it unto me, saith the Lord of Hosts." **Zech. vii. 5.**

4. It is to make the glory of God the end of all we do — — —there is no godliness without this. — — —If we repent of sin merely on account of its consequences, as affecting ourselves, it is not sorrowing after a godly sort. — — —Love to God is not genuine, unless it has the excellence of his character for its object. — — —True godliness feels for the glory of God, and is deeply interested in its advancement.

5. If we be godly, we shall seek communion with God — — —shall delight in secret duties, in drawing near to him, and displaying all our heart before him. — — —Much intercourse with heaven is essential to the life and power of true religion.

6. To be godly is to make the enjoyment of God our chief portion, our ultimate bliss — — —relinquishing every other object in comparison of this — — —making his friendship our all in all, and desiring his loving-kindness as better than life. This only is true godliness.

II. CONSIDER THE PRIVILEGES OF THE GODLY: "THE LORD HATH SET HIM APART FOR HIMSELF."

1. 'They are "set apart," as the first-born of Israel, and their firstfruits, by being devoted to the Lord — — —as the whole nation of Israel, who were chosen to be a peculiar people; or as the tribe of Levi, who were to be the Lord's inheritance.

1st. This consecration is accomplished by effectual calling, "being chosen from the beginning, through sanctification of the Spirit, and belief of the truth." — — —All that are truly godly are chosen out of the world, separated from the world, and ordained that they should bring forth fruit. John xv. 16.

2dly. 'They are also set apart in a way of providence, and God has a special regard to them in all his dispensations. — — —Though he will make an end of his enemies, he will not make a full end of them. — — —When he destroyed the old world, he set apart Noah for himself; and when Sodom was consumed, he did the same by Lot.

2. It is not without design that the godly are thus distinguished. — — —The Lord hath set them apart "for himself."

1st. That he may be glorified — — —"This people have I formed for myself, that they may show forth my praise." — — —They are God's witness before the world, to testify of the goodness of his government, and the exceeding riches of his grace — — —to give evidence of his truth and faithfulness, and of the efficacy of the blood of Christ.

2dly. That they may be finally saved, and become his everlasting portion. They are his, and he will set them apart in the last day, from the rest of the ungodly world — — —then he will gather up his treasure, and burn up the wicked as stubble. Mal. iii. 17.

Let sinners "know" this, that however they may treat the godly in this life, God is their friend, and he will delight in them to do them good.

Let the godly themselves "know" it for their comfort, and be assured that they are placed under divine protection.

ASSURANCE OF FAITH.

Psalm xxxv. 3.—Say unto my soul, I am thy salvation. (Pr.)

David was now suffering persecution, both from the tongue and from the hand of his enemies: ver. 1, 11. The beginning of the psalm is a continued prayer for divine interposition, where, under the form of an imprecation on his enemies, he pleads for his own protection and safety. The words of the text, which form a part of his supplication, appear to be interjected, as referring to his spiritual salvation; and could he but be assured of this, it would inspire him with courage against his enemies, and with confidence in the divine interposition on his behalf. But whether so understood or not, the passage may afford us some profitable reflections—

I. ALL OUR SALVATION, FROM FIRST TO LAST, IS FROM THE LORD.

He alone is the salvation of his people, and it ought to be expected only from him. Jonah ii. 9. He is pre-eminently the God of salvation, and this is his memorial in all generations.— —Temporal deliverances are from him. Ask Daniel, who restrained the fury of the lions? Ask the Hebrew children, who quenched the violence of fire? Ask Jonah, who brought him out of the whale's belly? They would all answer, it was the Lord's doings, and marvellous in our eyes. 2 Cor. i. 9.

That salvation especially which is spiritual and eternal, can belong only to the Lord: all others are excluded from having any hand in it. Isa. v. 16; Eph. ii. 8.— —The way of salvation is of his contrivance; he alone hath found a ransom, and devised means, that his banished ones be not expelled from him: all is the effect of his infinite wisdom and mercy. Eph. ii. 4, 5.— —All the blessings of salvation, from its commencement in our justification, to its consummation in glory, are of his providing. The foundation of this building, and the headstone, are brought forth by him, who is wonderful in counsel, and mighty in working.

II. A KNOWLEDGE OF INTEREST IN GOD'S SALVATION IS ATTAINABLE, OR DAVID WOULD NOT HAVE PRAYED FOR IT.

It is true, all good people do not attain this assurance; some of them live and even die without it; yet it is attainable.— —Comparative ignorance and unbelief are the chief preventives. — —Some have actually attained. I know, says Job, that my Redeemer liveth. I know, says Paul, in whom I have believed. Primitive believers knew that when their earthly house should be dissolved, they had a building of God, eternal in the heavens. 2 Cor. v. 1.— —A knowledge of interest in this salvation, is one of the principal objects of Holy Scripture. Rom. xv. 4; 1 John v. 13. It brings us to a conviction of our need of Christ, to our knowledge of him as the only Saviour, to an acceptance of him in that character, and to a happy persuasion of our interest in his great salvation.— —Those who do not actually enjoy this assurance, possess, notwithstanding, the principle from which it proceeds—faith, hope, a conscience purified by the blood of Christ, and unfeigned love to the brethren. 1 John iii. 14; iv. 12.— —If the certainty of our salvation were not attainable, we should not be commanded or encouraged as we are to seek after it. Heb. vi. 11; 2 Pet. i. 10.

III. AS AN ASSURANCE OF SALVATION IS POSSIBLE, SO IT IS ALSO HIGHLY DESIRABLE.

This appears from David's seeking so earnestly after it: "Say unto my soul, I am thy salvation." The thing speaks for itself, what a satisfaction it would afford to be assured that we are going to heaven. What an antidote

against the corroding cares and perplexities of life; what a source of contentment in the midst of poverty and want, and of joy in every tribulation. Hab. iii. 17; 2 Cor. iv. 17, 18.— — —What confidence would it inspire, in all our approaches to the mercy seat. Psal. lxxiii. 1; Heb. x. 22. Those who are assured of their interest in Christ, come to God as to their best and only friend, as children to their father. Eph. iii. 12.— — —This assurance is friendly to persevering holiness: nothing tends more to promote obedience, and a universal conformity to the will of God. 2 Peter i. 10; Psalm xxvi. 3.

IV. THE WAY TO OBTAIN THIS ASSURANCE IS, PARTLY BY SPEAKING TO GOD, AND PARTLY BY HIS SPEAKING TO US.

1. By speaking to God, as David does in the language of text, Prayer, fervent and constant prayer, is the principal means of clearing up our evidence. It is this that makes our face to shine, like the countenance of Moses, when descending from the mount. If we would meet the King of kings, we must do as when we wish to meet a friend; we must wait upon him in his walks. Thus David says, My soul follows hard after thee; and it was not long before he obtained what he so ardently desired. Ps. lxxiii. 8. For every spiritual blessing, God will be inquired of and he must be sadly mistaken who thinks he has obtained assurance in any other way. When Peter was praying upon the house top, the sheet was let down; and while Daniel was on his knees, the angel brought him good tidings. Dan. ix. 23. And as assurance can only be obtained in this way, so in this way only can it be preserved. God would not leave Jacob, so long as Jacob said, I will not let thee go.

2. By God's speaking to us: "Say unto my soul, I am thy salvation." So that in order to this assurance, God and the soul must meet and converse together.— — —The testimony that David wanted, was personal and particular: Say unto "~~my~~ soul," I am thy salvation. Jer. xxxi. 3. How is it that thou wilt manifest thyself to us, and not unto the world: yet so it is. When the Lord Jesus spake to Saul, in the way to Damascus, the voice was so immediately directed to him, that though his companions heard the sound, they understood not the speech.— — —The testimony is internal and spiritual, the Spirit bearing witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God. Men speak to the outward ear, but God has access to the "soul," and in the hidden parts can make us to understand wisdom. Rom. viii. 16.— — —When God speaks, it is not only encouraging, but effectual. There is no vocation, no consolation, like that which reaches to the heart. When God speaks, we not only hear but feel. Luke xix. 5, 6; xxiv. 32.

1. See what it is that alone can satisfy the soul of a good man. God gives to Esau a lordship, to Saul a kingdom, to Judas an apostleship, and they are satisfied. David also had a kingdom, but was not content: "Say unto my soul, I am thy salvation."

2. This prayer includes all other blessings. If God be our salvation, we have enough; all our desires are fulfilled, all our wants supplied.

3. Let those who have this assurance be thankful, but let them remember that it can be maintained only by habitual intercourse with God, and that it will need to be frequently renewed.

ORIGIN, PROGRESS, AND END OF TRUE RELIGION.

Philippians iii. 12.—Not as though I had already attained, either were already perfect; but I follow after, if that I may apprehend that for which also I am apprehended of Christ Jesus. (Pr.)

THERE is an intimate connection between justification by the righteousness of Christ, and sanctification by the Holy Spirit; for in the same breath in which the apostle prays for the one, he also prays for the other.— — — Some who are advocates for free justification, deny both the doctrine of sanctification and progressive holiness: but here they are united.

Three things are taught us in the text; namely—the origin—the progress—and the end of true religion.

I. THE ORIGIN OF TRUE RELIGION IN THE SOUL: this consists in our being “apprehended of Christ Jesus.”

The word signifies *seizing*, or laying hold of one, or taking him as it were into custody. Thus it is used in Acts xii. 4. 2 Cor. xi. 32.

Here the term is used figuratively, and alludes to Paul's being met with in his way to Damascus. Acts ix. 4, 5.— — — Thus it is that the Lord meets with poor sinners: sometimes by trying events in providence, as in the case of Manasseh and Ephraim. Jer. xxxi. Sometimes by the word preached, as in the case of Peter's hearers. Acts ii. Some who have attended the word from motives of curiosity, have thus been taken, like Zaccheus, and unable to relinquish their convictions.— — — Sometimes they have been overtaken at the mouth of the grave, and are apprehended, like the Phillipian jailor. Acts xvi. 29, 30. Sometimes by bringing them into difficulties which call their sin to remembrance, as in the case of Joseph's brethren. Sometimes by what is seen in godly people, the heart is taken captive, and “won by their conversation.” Sometimes by solitary reflection, and so gradually as scarcely to know when or how.

But by whatever means it is, if Christ “apprehends” us, we are taken captive and held fast, not against our will indeed, but are sweetly constrained to surrender up ourselves to him. Christ will not lose his prisoner when he has taken him.

In whatever way our conversion is effected, or by whatever means, God is the first moving cause: true religion does not begin with any act or exercise of ours. Like lost sheep, we do not seek him till he first seeks us.— We should never find the way to God of our own accord; his word indeed exhorts us to seek him, and it is both our interest and our duty to do so: yet every real christian must say with Paul, “By the grace of God I am what I am.” He that first loves us, first moves us to himself. Phil. ii. 13. 1 John iv. 10—19.

II. THE PROGRESS OF TRUE RELIGION: “that I may apprehend that for which also I am apprehended of Christ Jesus.”

Though we are passive in being “apprehended,” yet we then become active, and are drawn forth to “apprehend.” Hence Paul, when taken captive, cried out, Lord what wouldst thou have me to do?

1. Observe, every thing we feel or do in religion here is *imperfect*.—Repentance, faith, love, obedience, all is imperfect: we know not but in part, and we prophecy but in part. Every kind of holiness is the same, and it is a mercy to be assured that such are not rejected. Matt. xii. 20

2. True religion teaches us to *feel and own it*, instead of pretending to the contrary.— — — If Paul had “not attained,” it is presumption in any of

us to think we have: all pretences to entire freedom from sin are contrary to the Scriptures, to truth, and to universal experience. They indicate great ignorance of God's holy law, and of our own hearts. We shall always have occasion for that prayer: "Forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors."

3. Though perfection is not attained, it is of the nature of true religion to be *pursuing after it*. — — — Here are several phrases by which this idea is expressed—"I follow after"—"forgetting the things that are behind"—"reaching forth to those which are before"—"pressing towards the mark." All these allure to a race, and are expressive of the utmost desire to win the prize.

1. These terms imply that true religion is something positive; that it not merely consists in our being kept from evil, or remaining barren and unfruitful, but in something absolutely good.

2. That it is essential to true religion to be progressive, and to follow after perfection, though at a humble distance from the mark. — — — Wo to him that is at ease in Zion, and pleads for imputed sanctification, as well as for imputed righteousness.

3. That it interests the soul, like one who is running in a race: "reaching forth."—These terms describe the earnest breathings of the soul, and its longing after more holiness, like what is expressed in ver. 10.

III. THE END OF TRUE RELIGION: to "apprehend that for which we are apprehended."

We are apprehended "for" this purpose, that we might win the prize, and lay hold of it. This prize is a holy state; it is heaven, and eternal life, which believers finally attain.

1. Observe the encouragement for perseverance. Eternal life is before us: think of this in times of temptation, of persecution, and of arduous duty: let that fortify and animate us.

2. The connexion there is between our being effectually called and finally saved, or between grace here and glory hereafter. We are apprehended for this very purpose; and whom he justifies, them he also glorifies. Psa. lxxxiv. 11. Rom. viii. 30. 2 Cor. v. 5.

CHRISTIAN EDIFICATION.

2 Peter i. 5—8.—Giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue, and to virtue knowledge, and to knowledge temperance, and to temperance patience, and to patience godliness, and to godliness brotherly kindness, and to brotherly kindness charity. For if these things be in you, and abound, they make you that ye shall neither be barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. (Pr.)

GREAT things are here ascribed to the knowledge of God, and of Jesus our Lord, ver. 2: "grace and peace are hereby multiplied." All things pertaining to life and godliness are derived from hence, ver. 3. By it we are interested in exceeding great and precious promises, ver. 4. Yet we must not rest in knowledge, but add to it what is recommended in our text.

I. OBSERVE WHAT IS HERE SUPPOSED TO BE THE FOUNDATION OF THE CHRISTIAN CHARACTER, EVEN "FAITH."

Peter had before spoken of faith, and ascribed to it two qualities; namely, "its preciousness," verse 1, as having relation to a precious Saviour; and its being the same in all good men, under whatever dispensation they have lived, and whether they be weak or strong in faith: it still is "like" precious faith "with us."

The term "add" to your faith, denotes that faith must be first, as the foundation of all the rest; and indeed it is this which forms the basis of the Christian character. Jude 20.

More particularly, observe—

1. Nothing but faith will support the building. What is the virtue of heathens, and unconverted men? — — — What is the virtue of Jews and deists in modern times; or of nominal Christians? — — — It is destitute of all the graces mentioned in our text: it has nothing of temperance, patience, godliness, kindness, or charity belonging to it. — — — All attempts to build up men in holiness without faith, are utterly vain: we may build, but it must come down again. Faith in the Son of God is the foundation of all.

2. Faith is sufficient for this purpose: it is the root from whence all the graces grow, and the spring which waters and makes them fruitful. — — — No sooner did the murderous Jews believe in him whom they had crucified, than all these graces began to appear. Acts ii. — — — The profligate heathens the same; and thus it is to this day. When a sinner ready to perish embraces the gospel, he is from thence a new creature, cast in a new mould. Let him cease to oppose the gospel, and begin to obey it from the heart, and he becomes the servant of God, and his fruit unto holiness. Rom. vi 17—22.

II. NOTICE WHAT IS TO BE BUILT ON THIS FOUNDATION, OR ADDED TO IT.

"Giving all diligence." We must not stop at faith, for faith without works is dead: it is inoperative, and has no influence on the life. Such however is the faith of multitudes of nominal Christians, and of many also who make an open profession of religion.

"Giving all diligence." This implies that we shall not grow in grace, without care and close attention. Sloth and carnal ease will reduce our souls to a state like that of the vineyard of the sluggard, which is overgrown with weeds. — — — It is in grace as in nature; though the utmost diligence will fail without the blessing of God, yet neither will he give his blessing without diligence: the diligent soul shall be made fat, and he that watereth shall also himself be watered. Prov. xi. 25. xiii. 4. — — — Grace will not grow spontaneously; but must be watched and watered, by prayer and holy carefulness. Isai. xxvii. 3.

More particularly—

1. The first stone to be laid on your holy faith is "virtue." — — — We use this word for moral excellence in general, as distinguished from vice, or what is unlovely; but seems here to have a more specific meaning. — — — It is a military term, and denotes courage, fortitude or resolution: if it were what is generally meant by virtue, it would include all that follow in the text, and so could not be distinguished from them.

Give all diligence, that he may not be feeble, but strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus: not like the fearful and unbelieving, but like those who took joyfully the spoiling of their goods. Like Peter and John, who waxed bold to speak the word of the Lord, or like him who witnessed a good confession.

2. The next is "knowledge." — — — This is to regulate virtue or courage; energy and zeal without knowledge, would be dangerous. Even

love itself requires to be under its direction. Phil. i. 9. Courage in a soldier, without knowledge to guide it, would be misapplied: let all your zeal and energy therefore be under the regulation of God's word. As soldiers, know your dangers in order to avoid them; your enemies and their devices, to be able to meet and overcome them; your obligations, in order to fulfil them.— —In times of trial, heaven "expects every man to do his duty."

3. "Temperance." This denotes the right government of the appetites and passions. Also in giving to others admonition and reproof, so as to be angry and sin not. Psal. cxli. 5. Our Lord himself affords a kind and gentle reproof, in his conduct towards his disciples; and Paul in dealing with the Corinthians. Gal. vi. 1. 1 Cor. iv. 21. Ephes. iv. 31, 32.

4. To these must also be added "patience," which denotes the enduring of evil; as afflictions, persecutions, and reproches; and in this we have the example of Christ. 1 Pet. ii. 20—23. Also in waiting for the coming of the Lord. James v. 7. 1 Thes. i. 10.

5. "Godliness," or piety. This is to be like God, to bear his image, to be of his mind, to love him, fear him, and keep his glory in view. This runs through the whole of the Christian character.

6. "Brotherly kindness." This is that sweet disposition which feels towards the poorest Christian as a brother, in sympathising, and in rejoicing with him. Col. iii. 12. James i. 9, 10.

7. "Charity," or that candid disposition which thinketh no evil; which puts the best possible construction on the conduct and actions of others, and which envieth not— —a spirit of meekness and love. 1 Cor. xiii.

III. THE NECESSITY OF THESE ADDITIONS, THAT WE MAY "NEITHER BE BARREN NOR UNFRUITFUL."

It is here supposed that we may possess some knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, and yet be very barren withal: and if the building be not raised in the manner that is here expressed, we shall be so.

1. That we be "not barren." A person may be said to be barren when he bears no fruit, or when there is nothing positive in his religion; a sort of negative character.— —But nothing merely negative will do: he has apparently put off the old man, but not put on the new: he was once like a wilderness, full of briers and thorns; and now is like a barren heath. Jer. xvii. 5, 6. Matt. xii. 44.

2. That we be "not unfruitful." A person is unfruitful when he bears little fruit, and barren when he bears none at all; a field may have some fruit, and yet not be fruitful.— —God requires not merely the existence of true religion in the heart, but that it should grow exceedingly: and that "these things should be in us, and abound." 2 Thess. i. 11. 2 Pet. iii. 18.

GLORYING IN THE CROSS.

Galatians vi. 14.—God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world is crucified unto me, and I unto the world. (Pr.)

It is a mark of false religion, that it leads men to glory in something else, and not in the Lord. The Jews valued themselves on circumcision, and their

being the children of Abraham. The false teachers in the churches of Galatia displayed a great deal of vain-glorying, desirous of making a fair show in the flesh: ver. 12. They wished to ingratiate themselves with the Galatians, and to supplant the apostles. But Paul wholly disclaimed every thing of this kind, and declares his great object to be to glory in nothing but the cross of Christ. The language he employs is very strong, and expressive of the holy ardour of his mind, as will appear in the following particulars.

1. He considers the cross of Christ *as an object of glorying*. Had he consulted the opinion of the world, he would have found that it was the great shame of christianity. "Christ crucified was to the Jews a stumbling block, and to the Greeks foolishness." — — — It was Satan's design, in effecting the crucifixion of our Lord, to overwhelm his cause with contempt. It might therefore have seemed enough for Paul to say, God forbid that I should ever be ashamed of my Lord, though he was crucified: but instead of this, he accounts it an object of exultation.

2. It is with him *the only object* of glorying. Many would have thought that Paul might have gloried in some other things: his descent from the tribe of Benjamin, his zeal, his literary acquirements, his office, labors, success and reputation as an apostle. — — — He was formed to take a leading part in whatever he undertook. When an enemy to the gospel, he breathed out his whole soul in threatenings and slaughter against the church of God. When he became a friend, he was equally ardent in his defence. — — — Yet in none of these things would he glory, but in the cross of Christ.

3. He bears the most emphatic protest *against glorying in any thing else*: "God forbid!" Far be it from me to think of any other object. This mode of speaking is not used lightly. It is of the nature of a solemn oath, and applied to things which he held in the greatest abhorrence: so that those things with which others were elated, and in which they gloried, he most solemnly abjured. It would have shocked him to have valued himself on such grounds, or to have had his heart divided between Christ and the world. His language is, "Be HE my ambition, my joy, my hope, my life, my all!"

Oh what christians should we be, if our eye were thus single: if the things which make a fair show in the flesh, were regarded by us as they were by Paul. — — — "The world is crucified unto me, and I unto the world." I am as a dead man, and the world is dead to me: it has lost all its charms in my view, and it ceases to have any influence over me.

I. ENQUIRE WHEREIN THIS CRUCIFIXION TO THE WORLD CONSISTS, AND WHAT ARE THE CHARACTERS IN WHICH THIS SPIRIT IS EXEMPLIFIED.

1. Certainly not in those who are *eaten up of the love of the world*, and whose sole concern it is to increase their wealth. — — — Yet there are men of this description, and that under a profession of the gospel. Some make haste to be rich, regardless of the means: others who are poor, may be of the same disposition, fretting and murmuring against God, and thinking hard of their lot.

The man who is dead to the world is one who is content with his portion: more concerned to devote what he has to the glory of God, than to increase it. — — — It is not him who can find no time for God and religion: but he who in all his ways acknowledges him, and sets the Lord always before him. — — — It is not him who retires from the world, like a monk or a hermit; but he who while in the world, devotes his all to God, and walks as in his sight.

Let but all our concerns and undertakings in life be subordinate to the interests of religion, and they will rather aid than hinder our christian course

Such a one may say with Paul, "The world is crucified unto me, and I unto the world."

2. This spirit is certainly not found in men whose grand object it is to *secure the approbation of the world*, and to gain popular applause. The opinion of the world is to some men the oracle in which they trust: under its smiles they live, and under its frowns they die. Hence their principal concern is to secure the approbation of men by temporising principles, and by every means of servile conformity.

But not so Paul: with him it was a light matter to be judged of man's judgment, or to enjoy the smiles of the rich and the great. — — — The man who is crucified to the world, is he whose chief concern it is to be approved of God: he who can bear adversity without being unduly depressed, and prosperity without being elated by it.

3. It is not found in those who *mix something worldly with their religion*, in order to make it palatable, that the offence of the cross may cease. This has been a principal source of corruption, in doctrine and in worship: great pains have been taken by false teachers and false professors, to render the doctrine of the cross more grateful to the carnal heart. The judaising teachers did this, and may have done it since.

To be as Paul, is to lay aside all carnal reasoning and worldly policy, and as new-born babes desire the sincere milk of the word: to keep the ordinances as they were at first delivered, and to maintain the purity of gospel worship and discipline.

II. THE MEDIUM THROUGH WHICH THIS DEADNESS TO THE WORLD IS ACCOMPLISHED: "by the cross of Christ."

We may indeed be dead to the world, through the failure of mere natural powers, the infirmities of age, or the progress of disease; or from chagrin and disappointment, we may take delight in nothing. — — — But this is not the spirit inculcated by the example of Paul. The crucifixion of which he speaks is like that of a lesser light obscured by a greater: a little joy swallowed up by that which is unspeakable and full of glory.

1. Our *first believing in Christ crucified* produces this effect. — — — The love of former sins is relinquished: the things that have charmed us, charm us now no more: the company we once sought is no more desired: the riches, the honors, the pleasures of the world are no longer what they used to be: we say of all these things, get ye hence! — — — A new set of objects is now set before us, a new set of feelings is now excited: we have better riches, more abiding honors, more enduring substance, more refined pleasures, and delights.

2. The more deeply we enter into *the doctrine of the cross*, the more dead shall we be to every thing but Christ. — — — Paul at the latest period of life "counted all things but loss, for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ," and that he might still go on to "know him." — — — The wonders of the cross have fixed the admiration of angels, and, and produced in them a comparative indifference to every other object. Eph. iii. 10. 1 Pet. i. 12. — — — Be this my study on earth: my theme in heaven!

CHARACTERISTICS OF TRUE RELIGION

Isa. xlv. 5 — One shall say, I am the Lord's: and another shall call himself by the name of Jacob: and another shall subscribe with his hand unto the Lord, and surname himself by the name of Israel.

It is remarkable how God, in his dealings with his people, mixes judgment with mercy. It was but a little before, that the prophet had foretold the captivity of Israel; and the godly amongst them must have been greatly dejected by the tidings; for what would become of the cause of God? For their encouragement however, their return is afterwards predicted, ch. xl. 1: and here, though the last chapter speaks of giving "Jacob to the curse, and Israel to reproach," yet many great and precious promises are intermixed: ver. 1.

1. The Lord calls them by endearing names: "Jacob my servant, and Israel whom I have chosen," ver. 1. He loved them notwithstanding all their provocations

2. He reminds them of his having "made and formed them;" not merely as creatures and as men, but as a nation and people peculiar to the Lord. He formed them for himself, to show forth his praise.

3. He teaches them to draw inferences that he would "help them and bless them," and their posterity after them; and still he would remember his holy covenant, ver. 3.

4. Instead of their being swallowed up by the heathen, the time would come when the Gentiles should be accounted the seed of the church, and should "spring up as among the grass," ver. 4: and though not born of Abraham, they should say, "I am the Lord's." What promises are these! That which stumbled the carnal Jews, and even some of the primitive disciples, had been the support and comfort of the fathers of the church. Jer. xvi. 19.

Our text contains not only a promise of the conversion of the Gentiles to the God of Israel; but this promise affords a lively description of the nature of conversion itself, and furnishes *several interesting characteristics of true religion*—

I. IT IS PERSONAL.

All that is here said is spoken of *individuals*. "One" and "another" shall say, "I" am the Lord's. Many things are mentioned in the context, and elsewhere, of God's having chosen Israel as a *people*; but that did not avail to their salvation. There was even then a distinction between Israel after the flesh, and after the Spirit; between Israelites "indeed," and such as were so in appearance only; and the children of the promise were counted for the seed. Psa. lxxiii. 1: Johh i. 47; Gal. iv. 28; Phil. iii. 3.

God has also favored our *nation* with the gospel, and we are called christians; but those only are such who have believed with the heart unto righteousness.— — The Lord favors some *towns* more than others; but religion is still a personal thing, and not national or parochial. Some *families* are also highly favored in succession, one generation after another; yet religion is still personal, and there is no trusting to mere external privileges. Matt. iii. 9.

II. IT IS CORDIAL, OR WITH THE WHOLE HEART.

It includes the entire renunciation of every idol, and a full surrender of ourselves to the Lord.— — It begins in the heart: there is such a thing as being called "by the name of Israel," and swearing by the God of Israel;

yet not in truth, nor in righteousness. Isa. xlviii. 1. The Lord always had a right to our hearts, though he possessed them not; true conversion will lead us to say, "I am the Lord's."

1. Some for example have been given up to *open abominations*. They have been the slaves of brutal passions, wallowing in sin, and devoted to every species of iniquity; like the Corinthians who were madly set upon their idols.— — — But grace reaches many of these; and now they are washed and sanctified, in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God. 1 Cor. vi. 11.— — — The consequence of this is, a voluntary surrender of themselves to be the Lord's.

2. Others have been wholly *devoted to the world*. The love of money was the ruling passion; all their hearts and all their time was swallowed up in the cares of the world, and they were worshippers of the unrighteous mammon.— — — Yet we have seen in some of these, the love of the world giving way to the love of God, and a willingness to count all things but loss for Christ. Luke xix. 8; Phil. iii. 8.

3. Some have been in the highest degree *self-willed* and perverse. If reprov'd, they could not bear it; and he that reprov'd the scorner only got to himself a blot. Their tongues were their own, and they loved all devouring words.— — — But when religion reached the heart, these have become as little children, and all their pride has been abased. Now they are willing to sit at the feet of Jesus, and be numbered with his humble followers.

4. Some have felt a sensible and *strong aversion to God*, and every thing that is serious. They hated to think of him, or to be where he is worshipped; family prayer was a burden to them, and they wished to be free from the yoke of domestic authority.— — — Yet such as these have been reconciled by the blood of the cross, and have given themselves up to God.

5. Others have been peculiarly prejudiced against those *doctrines and ordinances* that are the nearest to the truth, and have proclaimed war against their author.— — — Yet we have seen some of these brought to submit, and embrace those very truths they once opposed. Thus the scribes and pharisees who believed, joined the sect that was every where spoken against.

6. Not a few have been remarkable for their *carelessness and negligence* about their souls and eternal things. They have been light-minded, poor thoughtless creatures. Nothing had any effect upon them: they were not grieved for the affliction of Joseph, but drank their wine in bowls, and chaunted to the sound of the viol. Amos vi. 6.— — — But we have seen their careless ones made to think, and lay their folly to heart, and eventually to say, We are the Lord's.

III. TRUE RELIGION IS DECIDED.

Here is no hesitation; the surrender is full and unreserved. The language is not, I will or may be, but "I am" the Lord's. — — — There are many cases of an opposite description, which we have frequent occasion to observe.

1. Some persons remain in *suspense*, between God and the world. They have had many convictions: the kingdom of heaven is near them, and they are not far off: and yet they have gone back to the world, to see whether they cannot make better of it.

2. Some still cleave to *their own righteousness*, and cannot wholly give it up. But true religion will constrain us to part with every thing, to be the Lord's.

3. Others take *no decided part* in religion. If God's cause prosper, they have no joy, no part in it. If it decline they do not mourn. These per-

sons do not consider God's cause as their own, nor do they feel when it is dishonored.

True religion is the opposite of all this; it is decidedly for Christ, and makes his cause our own. Its language is, Thine are we, David, and on thy side, thou son of Jesse. 1 Chron. xii. 18.

IV. IT IS SOCIAL.

They shall "call themselves by the name of Jacob, and surname themselves by the name of Israel." Those who are joined to the Lord will naturally feel a union with them that love him. Jacob and Israel were then the people of God; and the language of these converts would be, "We will go with you, for we have heard that God is with you." Zech. viii. 21—23. There is a cleaving to the people of God, like that of Ruth to Naomi. Ruth i. 16.

There have been times and places in which, for a person to "subscribe" himself an Israelite or a Christian, would require a considerable sacrifice, and would cost him his liberty or his life. Yet true religion will cause us to cleave to the people of God, even in the worst of time. Mal. iii. 16; Acts iv. 23, ix. 26; Heb. xi. 25.

V. IT IS INFLUENCED BY EXAMPLE.

"One" shall say, I am the Lord's, "and another" shall call himself by the name of Jacob: "and another shall subscribe with his hand unto the Lord."—— It is here implied, that one person resigning himself unto the Lord and his people, would be the means of exciting others to do the same. The conversion of one sinner is oftentimes the occasion of converting another, and the obedience of one is followed by that of others. Hence the importance of social and family religion. —— We are greatly influenced by example; and it is frequently seen, that if those who sustain a religious character live in the neglect of gospel ordinances, others will plead their conduct in justification of themselves, and consider them as of no importance. So on the contrary, if faithful and diligent in following Christ, others will be induced to follow the example.

Let us remember—1. That we must either be the Lord's or Satan's. *Servants* we must be: choose ye therefore this day whom ye will serve.—2. If we become the Lord's, it must become voluntarily: it must be the surrender of the heart, and of all we have to him.

CHRISTIAN CONTENTMENT.

Philippians iv. 11.—I have learned, in whatever state I am, therewith to be content. -

THIS was the declaration of a great man of God: and it will be happy for us to aspire after his example. The Philippians had been very kind to him, in ministering often to his necessities, and he took it well at their hands: yet he wished them to know that he made no great account of the good things of this life, but could do without them.

It is not the language of boasting, however, of his own strength; no, he was indebted to Christ for all: ver. 13.— — This is a lesson which but few have learned, but which is of great importance for us to study daily.

EXPLAIN THE NATURE OF CHRISTIAN CONTENTMENT, AND WHEREIN IT CONSISTS.

It does not consist in insensibility or indifference, as to our situation in the present life. Paul himself felt the hardships to which he was subject, and prayed to be delivered from them. He was keenly sensible of "the thorn in the flesh," and besought the Lord that it might depart from him. He also felt the injuries of men towards him, and prayed to be delivered out of the hands of the wicked and unreasonable. But he considered his lot in life as the will of God; and deeming that alone to be sufficient, he was quite content.

More particularly—

1. To be content is to be *satisfied with our station in life*, without envying those who are above us, or in superior circumstances.— — — Men in general are seeking great things for themselves, and make it their leading object to ascend up into the higher stations of society: but christian contentment is satisfied with its lot.— — — The former description of persons are always looking at those above them, and feel envy; while the latter look at those below them, and feel thankful.— — — The former is a sort of ambition which no means can gratify.

2. It is to be satisfied *in all the vicissitudes which may attend us in our station*. — — — If prosperous, we shall be thankful: if adverse, we shall consider that the hand of the Lord is in it. There is much self-deception in supposing that we should be content in another situation, if wholly discontent in that which we already occupy; though nothing is more common than for persons to imagine, that if they were only in such and such circumstances, then they should be happy, but it is all delusion.

Paul says, "In whatsoever state I am;" and the exhortation is, Be content with such as "ye have;" not with what ye might be, or might have.

It may be that we are poor, afflicted, oppressed: and can these things be agreeable? No, not in themselves: but viewed as the cup which our Father has given us to drink, and considering the whole of our lot as of divine appointment, we may feel content, let it be whatever it may. — — — This spirit too will humble us under the calamities which may befall the nation or the world; knowing that there is no evil in a city, and the Lord hath not done it. Amos iii. 6. 1 Thess. iii. 3.

3. It is made up of *resignation, humility, and thankfulness*. — — — The language of true contentment is, "Thou Lord shalt choose our inheritance—I will bear the indignation of the Lord—If he say, I have no delight in thee, here I am—The Lord is my portion, saith my soul, therefore will I hope in him."

II. NOTICE THE EMINENT EXAMPLE OF CONTENTMENT AFFORDED US IN THE LIFE OF PAUL.

Much of the meaning and force of language depends on the character and situation of the speaker. — — — If Paul had been in high life, in a state of affluence and ease, his words would have no force. But he was not: and what is more, his poverty and affliction were the effect of his religion, and his love to Christ. — — — He might have been otherwise, but he counted all things but loss for him. — — — Many persons circumstanced, as Paul was would have felt more keenly than he did.

The situations through which he had to pass were of no ordinary description, as may be seen by the enumeration given us in 2 Cor. vi. 4—10, and xi. 23—27. — — — Are we poor? so was he. Are we destitute and hungry? so was he. Are we afflicted and oppressed? so was he. And yet his language is, "I have learned, in whatsoever state I am, therewith to be content"

III. THE WAY IN WHICH HE ATTAINED THIS DESIRABLE STATE OF MIND: "I HAVE LEARNED"

It was not natural to him; but he received it, he "learned" it. And where did he learn it? Not at the feet of Gamaliel, nor while a pharisee; but in the school of Christ, and at the foot of the cross.

1. He learned it from *the precepts of God's word*.——He understood that it was God's right to govern, and ours to obey: that every thought is to be brought into subjection to him. This lesson also David learned, and taught to others. Psalm xxxvii. 1—7.

2. He learned it from *the principles of the gospel*, and so learned it as to make it his own. He learned it especially from the doctrine of the cross, by which he was crucified to the world, and the world to him. Gal. vi. 14.

3. From *the example of Christ himself*.——He who was rich, for our sakes became poor—The cup which my Father giveth me, shall I not drink it—He was meek and lowly in heart: a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief.——This was Paul's pattern, and he copied after it.

1st. It glorifies God and the gospel, to trust all in his hands, and to rely on its faithfulness and truth. The contrary disposition tends to dishonour both.

2dly. How much does this spirit of contentment promote our own happiness, and the happiness of others. What a blessed world would this be, if such a spirit universally prevailed.

3dly. It has the promise of God's presence: "Be content with such things as ye have, for he hath said, I will never leave thee nor forsake thee." Heb. xiii. 5,

ADVICE TO THE AFFLICTED.

Psalm lxi. 2.—From the end of the earth will I cry unto thee, when my heart is overwhelmed: lead me to the Rock that is higher than I. H. H.

IN whatever situation we be, we shall find both consolation in the promises, and direction in the examples that are recorded for our use in the Sacred Writings. But in seasons of affliction principally will the holy Oracles be found precious, because they exhibit to us God's dearest children in similar circumstances, and point out to us the means, which they, in their troubles, found effectual for their relief.

In recommending the example of David, we shall,

I. MENTION SOME SEASONS WHEREIN OUR HEARTS ARE APT TO BE OVERWHELMED—

This is a vale of tears to all: but to some more especially,

1. From temporal calamities—

Bodily pains, loss of friends, 2 Sam. xviii. 33.; embarrassed circumstances, will weigh down the spirits even of the best. And though, at times, religion will enable them to triumph in the midst of all their tribulations, yet its more common operation is, to moderate their grief, to produce resignation in their souls, and to sanctify the affliction to their spiritual advancement.

2. From spiritual troubles—

The *first convictions* of penitents are often accompanied with the deepest

anguish; insomuch that, if God did not support them by a hope of his mercy, they might, like Judas, destroy themselves in utter despair. Their subsequent views also of their in-dwelling corruptions are frequently attended with such dejection, as quite to enervate the body and overwhelm the soul. Isai. xxxv. 3. 4. Rom. vii. 24. If to these be added the hidings of God's face, the soul may have a foretaste even of hell itself in the miseries that it endures. Ps. lxxvii. 2—9.

3. From the near prospect of death—

To a person enjoying the Divine presence, death has no terrors, Phil. 1. 21, 23: it is a welcome messenger, that cannot come too soon. But to one in spiritual darkness and desertion, it is inexpressibly dreadful; and the whole world would appear but a small price to pay for the respite of a few days. The ungodly, it is true, too often die as insensible as the beast: but the godly, who know the terrors of the Lord, cannot pass through that dreary valley without extreme horror, unless they have an inward witness of their acceptance with God. Ps. lv. 4, 5, and perhaps Isai. xxxiii. 10—14.

The example in the text may serve as a model, while we endeavour to,

II. SHEW HOW WE SHOULD CONDUCT OURSELVES IN THOSE SEASONS—

1. To speake generally, we should betake ourselves to prayer—

God is the only source of strength and consolation. If we apply to the creature in our distress, we shall invariably find him but a broken reed. Hos. v. 14; Isai. xxxi. 3. On the contrary, the pressure that is on our minds will, for the most part, increase: or, if the trouble be removed, the removal will prove a heavier judgment than its continuance. But if we apply with humility to a throne of Grace, the desired effect will almost instantly appear. Isai. lxxv. 24. There is no trouble from which prayer has not extricated the sons of men: it prolonged the life of Hezekiah, 2 Kin. xx. 1—6.; brought Jonah from the bottom of the sea, Jonah ii. 1—7; and restored to peace the tempest-tossed soul of David. Ps. cxvi. 3—8. For us also, if it be fervent, it shall effectually prevail, Jam. v. 16: there is no disquietude which it shall not pacify, “no sorrow which it shall not turn into songs of joy. Ps. l. 15. Wherever we are therefore, even “at the very ends of the earth,” and however circumstanced, we should make our requests known unto God, in order to the attainment of solid peace. Phil. iv. 6, 7.

2. More particularly, we should beg of God to lead us to the Saviour—

David, though a king, had no sufficiency in himself: he was forced to look to one higher than himself, even to Jesus, the Rock of his salvation. Ps. lxxxix. 19. But how should he come to Jesus, unless the Father should draw him? John vi. 44. Hence he prayed so fervently, that God would “lead” him to that Rock. Thither then must we also go; for there alone can we find stability. Does guilt appal us? nothing but the blood of Jesus can compose our mind. Acts xvi. 29—31. Do temptations harass us? nothing but his grace can enable us to withstand them. 2 Cor. xii. 9. Do accumulated troubles threaten to overwhelm us? we can both do and suffer all things, if HE strengthen us, Rom. viii. 37; yea, we shall be more than conquerors through him that loved us, ib. Like a shipwrecked mariner standing on a rock, we may defy the waves that roar beneath our feet. Such was the experience of David himself, Ps. xl. 1—3; and such shall be ours also, if the storms that threaten us drive us for security to that place of safety. Let us then, in every affliction, look to Jesus as our help; and, with a deep impression of our inability to go to him aright, let us cry unto God, “Lead me to the Rock that is higher than I!”

ADDRESS,

1. Those who experience no overwhelming troubles—

However serene the sky at present be, no man knows how soon a storm may arise. But supposing our voyage through life be ever so favourable, it must come to an end: and what shall we do in the hour of death without an interest in Christ? Above all, what must become of us, if we be not fixed upon that Rock at the day of judgment? Let us then improve our tranquil hours in securing an establishment on Christ Jesus; that, however suddenly calamities may come, or death may summon us into the presence of our God, we may be found standing immoveably on the Rock of ages. Then, like Noah, shall we rejoice in God's favour, when thoughtless myriads shall be overwhelmed in the deluge of his wrath.

2. Those who are bowed down under trouble—

You are but too apt to carry your complaints to men, instead of spreading them before God. What wonder then you find no deliverance? Has not David told you, that this was his very experience; and that nothing but the use of this remedy afforded him relief? Ps. xxxii. 3—5. Chide then, and resist, your backwardness to prayer. Lay the blame, not on God, who is willing to impart help, but on yourselves, who are unwilling to implore it. Your troubles are sent on purpose to drive you to the Saviour, whom, in a time of prosperity, you are too prone to neglect: and if you suffer them to produce that effect, you shall soon number them among your richest blessings.

GODLINESS WITH CONTENTMENT.

1 Tim. vi. 6.—Godliness with contentment is great gain. (H. H.)

To the great dishonor of christianity, there are many professors, and even preachers of it, who are more intent on promoting their own temporal interests, or the interests of their party, than on advancing practical religion in the world. Of such persons St. Paul is speaking in the context: and he enjoins Timothy to withdraw himself from them, as from persons who disgraced the christian name, by giving reason to people to conclude, that "they supposed gain to be godliness." In opposition to such characters, the apostle reverses that which he had stated as their opinion; and declares, that though gain was not godliness, godliness was gain, yea, "great gain," if it were joined "with contentment."

In vindication of this sentiment, we shall shew,

I. WHAT WE ARE TO UNDERSTAND BY "GODLINESS."

The frame of mind which we may conceive the angels to enjoy, would be by no means suited to our state: we are sinners, redeemed sinners; and therefore "godliness" must include such a frame of mind as becomes persons in our condition. In this view, it implies,

1. An affiance in God through Christ—

This is the fountain of all true religion. Whatever a man may possess without this, he has not one particle of real godliness. If we could suppose him to be as just and honest, as kind and amiable, yea, as devout and fervent as ever man was, still, if he had not the heart of a sinner, of a sinner justly

condemned, and delivered from condemnation solely by the blood of Christ, he would be utterly destitute of true religion.— — —

2. A devotedness to God in Christ—

This must spring from the former: for though faith and practice differ from each other, as much as the root of a tree does from the fruit it bears, yet we must by no means separate them, since they are equally essential to real godliness. A reformation of the external conduct, or a partial surrender of the heart to God, will not suffice: if we would be approved by God, we must have our whole selves, body, soul, and spirit, sanctified to his service.— — — And as Christ is the only Mediator through whom we approach to God so must Christ, that is, God in Christ, be our only Lord and Governor.

When we have just views of the nature of godliness, we shall see,

II. ITS CONNEXION WITH CONTENTMENT—

Such godliness as has been described must bring contentment with it, since all who possess it must feel,

1. A consciousness that they deserve the miseries of hell—

No person can have an entire affiance in God through Christ, till he have felt his desert of God's wrath and indignation. And can such a person be discontented with any lot that may be assigned him? Must he not, even in the most afflicted situation, say, "Shall a living man complain, a man for the punishment of his sins?" Will he not call every affliction light, yea, lightness itself, in comparison of the misery he deserves? Will he not, under the pressure of the heaviest calamities, thank God that he is not in hell?

2. A sense of infinite obligation to God for mercies received—

One who has within him the constituents of real godliness, must see himself to be infinitely indebted to God for the gift of his dear Son, for the knowledge of salvation by him, and for the prospect of everlasting glory. His sense of these mercies cannot but be heightened also by the consideration, that they were never once offered to the fallen angels, nor accepted by the great majority of those to whom they have been offered. Can such an one repine that he has a less measure of health, or riches, or temporal conveniences than others, when he is so far exalted above them in things of infinitely greater moment?

3. A willingness to be conformed to the image of Christ—

No true disciple of Christ expects or wishes to be in a state different from that which his Lord and Master experienced when on earth. But what was the condition of Jesus in the world? Did he live in ease and affluence and honor? No; "he was despised and rejected of men, a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief." He subsisted oftentimes on the benevolence of his friends and followers; and often had not as much as "a place where to lay his head." Who that reflects on this, will murmur at his lot, even though nothing but poverty and persecution should await him? Will he not check the first risings of discontent with this obvious reflection, "The disciple cannot be above his Lord: it is sufficient for the disciple that he be as his Lord?"

The connexion of godliness with contentment being thus plain, let us, consider,

III. THE ADVANTAGE OF IT AS SO CONNECTED—

St. Paul tells us, that "godliness is profitable unto all things, having the promise of the life that now is, and of that which is to come." Let us view it then,

1. In reference to this life—

Money has obtained the exclusive title of "gain:" but godliness has an incomparably greater right to that appellation. There are three principal ends for which money is considered as valuable; namely, to provide present gratifications, to secure against future troubles, and to benefit our children or dependents. But in these respects it cannot for one moment stand in competition with godliness,—that godliness I mean which is connected with contentment. Suppose money to afford ever such high gratifications, (though it is very much over-rated by the generality,) will not pardon of sin, peace of conscience, and the enjoyment of the divine presence, far outweigh them all? Suppose money to afford effectual relief in trouble, (though it cannot assuage our pain either of mind or body,) what consolations can it afford equal to those which result from godliness and contentment? The utmost that money can do, is to procure some outward relief; whereas the piety above described will convert every cross into a comfort, and every trouble into a fountain of joy. We are ready to acknowledge that money has its uses, and very important uses too, in reference to our children or dependents, (though it not unfrequently is a curse to them rather than a benefit,) yet even in this view it is far inferior to religion: for the godly and contented man will instruct his children and dependents in those principles which he has found so beneficial to himself: and who can duly estimate the benefit of such instructions, confirmed and enforced by such an example? Who can value sufficiently the intercessions of such a friend? Suppose a dying man to address his surviving relatives, "I have not wealth laid up for you in my coffers, but I have thousands of prayers treasured up for you in heaven, which, I trust, will come down in blessings on your heads, when I lie mouldering in the dust: I have engaged my God to be the husband of the widow, and the Father of the fatherless; yes, my dear wife and children, I have intreated *him* to take care of you; and I believe that my prayers have not gone forth in vain:" I say, such a legacy would be far better than thousands of silver and gold.

Thus in every view for which money is coveted, godliness with contentment is a richer portion.

2. In reference to the world to come—

The blindest worldling in the universe is not foolish enough to think that "riches will profit him in the day of wrath." In the words following the text this point is established beyond all contradiction; "For we brought nothing into this world, and it is certain that we can carry nothing out." Here therefore all competition ceases; and "gain" must be confessed to belong exclusively to the godly and contented mind.

ADDRESS,

1. Those who boast of contentment, while they are destitute of godliness—

That persons may feel contentment while enjoying all that they can wish, we readily acknowledge. But we have not real contentment, unless we could be contented with any change of circumstances which God might see fit to appoint. Nor indeed can this fruit spring from any thing but real godliness. Therefore the complacency which many take in their own fancied contentment, while they are uninfluenced by vital godliness, is a delusion, which, if not rectified in time, will issue in the most fearful disappointment and misery.

2. Those who profess godliness, but manifest a worldly or discontented spirit—

The tree must be judged by its fruits. In vain are the highest pretensions to christian experience, if we be not dead to the world, and resigned to the will of God. O brethren, how many professors of godliness have, "through

a desire to be rich, *βουλόμενοι πλετεῖν*, ver. 9—11, fallen into snares and temptations, and into foolish and hurtful lusts, which have drowned them in destruction and perdition!" Remember, that "the love of money is the root of all evil, which while some have coveted after, they have pierced themselves through with many sorrows." But thou man of God, flee these things, and seek rather to be "rich towards God."

3. Those who profess both godliness and contentment—

Know, that you have a richer portion than crowns or kingdoms. You never can have occasion to envy any man. Only seek to grow in these divine graces. Give yourselves up wholly to God; and "having food and raiment, be therewith content." Verse 8. Godliness is "durable riches;" and one grain of contentment is worth a talent of gold. Let it appear, Beloved, that you live under a full persuasion of these things; and that your ardor in pursuit of heaven is accompanied with a proportionable indifference about the things of time and sense.

THE FRUITS AND EFFECTS OF HOPE.

1 John iii. 3.—Every one that hath this hope in him, purifieth himself, even as he is pure. (H. H.)

THE people of God are but little known to an ungodly world: instead of being considered according to their true character, they are regarded as hypocrites, enthusiasts, and disturbers of their brethren's peace. But this is easily accounted for: the world know not God; and therefore it is no wonder that they know not his people. But the saints themselves have a very inadequate conception of the honor that is put on them, or of the glory that is reserved for them. They know indeed that they are sons of God; but they have very little idea of what is comprehended in that relation: and as to their eternal state, they can form no precise judgment respecting it; they only know, in the general, that they shall be like God, and be with him for ever. Yet, though so little known to the world and to themselves they have marks whereby they may be clearly distinguished; they may be known by their uniform endeavors after holiness. To this effect the apostle speaks in the words before us; from which we shall take occasion to consider,

I. THE CHRISTIAN'S HOPE—

Christ is the fountain and foundation of a sinner's hope: without Christ, all must have perished: nor has the most eminent saint any more hope than a fallen angel, except as he is interested in the merits of Christ. But through *him** the believer has a glorious hope;

1. That he is a child of God—

Christ, having purchased us with his own blood, has reconciled us to God, and made us his children. He teaches his followers to consider themselves as standing in this relation to God, not merely like the angels who are his sons by creation, but in a more exalted manner by regeneration and adoption: and he teaches them to expect from him throughout their whole lives the blessings suited to that high dignity.— — Verse 1; John i. 12, 13; Matt. vi. 6, 8, 9, 31, 32, 33.

*The text does not say, ἐν ἑαυτῷ in himself, but ἐν αὐτῷ in him, that is, in Christ.

Now the true Christian hopes that he is brought into this happy state, and that he shall receive from God all those endearing tokens of affection which the relation of sonship emboldens him to expect. This hope of his is founded partly on the merits of his Saviour, and partly on the internal evidence which he has, that he is interested in the Saviour. The mere circumstance of Christ having laid down his life for him, would not be a sufficient ground for him to number himself among the family of God: but when he has the testimony of his own conscience that he has sought acceptance with God through the death of Christ, then he is enabled to indulge a hope that the privileges annexed to such a state belong to him.

2. That he shall be with God, and like him, for ever—

The blessings which the saints enjoy are not confined to this life: "Being sons of God, they are also heirs; heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ." Rom. viii. 15—17. "Though they know not yet what they shall be, they know that, when they shall see him, they shall be like him: for they shall see him as he is." Verse 2. The time is coming, when they shall all be introduced into his immediate presence, and be with him, and like him for ever. This also is an object of the Christian's hope.— —He believes that this is the heritage of the saints; and that "what God hath promised, he is able, and willing, to fulfil."

That this is no barren hope, will appear from,

II. THE EFFECT IT PRODUCES IN HIM—

Every Christian will endeavor to purify himself to the uttermost—

The Christian cannot wilfully live in any known sin: he will search out his corruptions, in order to subdue them; and his duties, in order to fulfil them.— —He will propose to himself the Lord Jesus Christ as his pattern; and though he can never hope to attain absolute perfection in this life, he will not rest satisfied with any thing short of that. He would gladly be "holy as God is holy, and perfect, even as his Father in heaven is perfect." He considers how the Lord Jesus acted in reference to his God: how in reference to man; and what tempers he manifested in the whole of his deportment;— —then he labors to follow *his* example, and to "walk in all things as he walked."

To these endeavors he will be stimulated by his hope in Christ:

He cannot endure to think himself a child of God, and yet act like a child of the devil: he cannot please himself with a prospect of enjoying and resembling God in a future life, without seeking communion with him and a resemblance to him in the present world. He will feel himself impelled to holiness by a *sense of duty*; he knows he cannot be saved in any other way. Ps. xxiv. 3, 4; Matt. v. 8; Heb. xii. 14; Rev. xxi. 27: by a *sense of gratitude*; 1 Thess. ii. 12; 2 Cor. v. 14, 15; yea, moreover, by a *love of holiness itself*.— —Ps. cxix. 128.

We must not however imagine that it is by any power of his own that he thus "purifies himself;" the duty and the exertion are his: James iv. 8: but the power, both to will and to do, proceeds from God alone. Phil. ii. 13.

We shall improve this subject,

1. For conviction—

All profess to have a hope in Christ: but before we conclude that to be well-founded, we must examine what fruits it produces: Are we seeking after universal holiness? Are we contented with no measure of holiness short of perfection itself? Are we setting the Lord Jesus before us, and taking him for our pattern in all our tempers, and in our conduct towards God and man? This is the criterion by which St. John himself teaches us

to judge of our hope: ver 6—10: and St. James confirms it—by declaring, that, if in any one point (the not bridling of our tongue, for instance,) we allowedly deviate from this path, our religion is vain. Jam. i. 26. O consider this, lest your hope be only as the spider's web, that will be swept away with the besom of destruction!

2. For encouragement—

Though we must not think our hope well-founded, unless it produce in us the fruits of righteousness, yet we must not imagine that our righteousness is to be *the ground* of our hope, or even *our warrant* to hope in Christ. The only ground of our hope must be found in Christ, and in the promises which God has made to those who believe in him. We must go to Christ *as sinners*; and then he will enable us to live *as saints*. This distinction is clearly marked in the text: our hope in Christ is to precede, not to follow, the purification of our hearts: and our holiness is to be the fruit, not the root, of our hope. The same distinction is made by St. Paul also, who, having spoken of our sonship with God, says, “Having therefore these promises, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness both of flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God.” 2 Cor. vii. 1. See the same also by St. Peter, 2 Pet. i. 4. We must not wait till we are cleansed, and then embrace the promises: but first embrace the promises; and then make use of them for the cleansing of our souls.

What encouragement does this afford to those who feel the corruption of their hearts, and who, if their own purity were to be *the foundation* of their hope, would be in utter despair! Go then, how polluted soever ye are, and seek pardon and sanctification at the hands of Jesus; and you shall find him “faithful and just, to forgive you your sins, and to cleanse you from all unrighteousness.” 1 John i. 9.

HAPPY ISSUE OF SANCTIFIED AFFLICTION.

Psa. xcvii. 11.—Light is sown for the righteous, and gladness for the upright in heart. (Pr.)

THE mode of expression used in this passage is common in Hebrew poetry, which consists of a double sentence, the latter part of which is illustrative of the former. “Light” is here put for gladness, and “righteous” for the “upright in heart.” — — — The whole is designed to teach us, that the most upright of men must expect a portion of darkness and sorrow for the present; but that it shall sooner or later come to a happy issue. All our enjoyments arise from contrast: if there were no darkness and sorrow here, light and gladness would not be what it will be hereafter.

I. NOTICE A FEW OF THOSE SORROWS WHICH ATTEND THE GODLY IN THE PRESENT STATE, AND OBSERVE THEIR HAPPY ISSUE.

There is abundant reason to expect a portion of darkness and sorrow in this life, because—

1. If we now sustain the character of “the righteous and the upright in heart,” yet this was *not always the case with us*; and much of our present darkness and sorrow may be the bitter fruit of former sins. — — — Though God may have forgiven us, yet he may also continue to take vengeance on our inventions: personal and relative troubles may be the consequence. Ps. xcix. 8. — — — Manasseh must walk in darkness and sorrow, and seeing the fruits of his sin all his days.

Yet if found "righteous" before God, we shall be forgiven, and all this darkness shall be turned into light. God may chasten us here, but it will only be for a time: he will hide his face, but it will only be for a little moment, and the indignation shall be overpast. He will wipe away all tears from the faces of his people, and sorrow and sighing shall be heard no more. *Psa. xxx. 5. Isa. xii. 1; liv. 7, 8; lvii. 16—19. Rev. vii. 17; xxi. 4.*

2. Though "upright" on the whole, yet there have been *deviations in our conduct* since we were made "righteous," and many backslidings from God: and our present darkness and sorrow may be the fruit of these.— —David had much of this in his latter days: the sword departed not from his house and it may be so with us. Many eminent characters have at different times been driven aside into temptation, or some unexpected evil, which has darkened their sky, and eclipsed both their evidences and their comforts — —Some easily besetting sin indulged, or some created good idolized, will eat up all our religion, and bring sorrow and darkness with it.

But if we be truly "righteous," things will come to a happy issue at last

3. Irrespective of particular sins, it pleases God in the present state to *humble and try us* by various dark dispensations of providence. Israel were to have the good land, but they must go through the wilderness to possess it. This was a dark passage, but the Lord led them about, that he might try them, and know what was in their hearts. *Deut. viii. 3.*

God sometimes brings his people into *dark and trying circumstances*, into situations from whence they can see no way of escape. — —This was the case with Job: yet the Lord lighted his lamp at last, even in this world. *Job xlii. 12; James v. 11.* — —Thus also with Judah in her captivity, *Lam. iii. 5—9*: yet the cloud was dissipated at last: and there are many such seasons in our life, if we did but keep a register of God's mercies.

Sometimes the Lord brings upon us a load of *relative grief and trouble*, such as we cannot unbind or get rid of. — —Unhappy connections, disobedient children, become a source of overwhelming distress. Thus Jacob's grey hairs were brought with sorrow to the grave: at least the latter part of his life was greatly embittered by this means. — —Unhappy connections in religion, union without fellowship in the Spirit, attended with discord and evil surmisings, are likewise productive of similar effects.

But if we are truly "upright," all these things will end well at last.

4. A large portion of sorrow and darkness that a good man endures in this life, *arises from what he has within him*, and continually carries about with him; even a body of sin and death, which makes him truly wretched. — —Hence we are often in the dark in secret duties, in reading, and hearing the word.

But if upright all this shall be removed. God shall bruise Satan under your feet shortly: faith shall be finally victorious: we must therefore hope to the end, for the grace that shall be brought to us at the revelation of Jesus Christ. *1 Pet. i. 13.*

Much darkness and sorrow also attend *the church of God*, collectively, as well as individual believers. — —Israel was long in Egypt, but the Lord brought them out at last with a high hand: in Babylon also, but the day of their redemption came. — —The church has often been in persecution, but God has confounded all them that rose up against it. So now, Christ will one day gather out of his kingdom all things that offend. *Matt. xiii. 41—43.*

II. CONSIDER THE GROUND OF OUR HOPE FOR SUCH AN ISSUE.

"Light is *sown* for the righteous, and gladness for the upright in heart:" and therefore, sooner or latter, it shall spring up.

1. It is sown in the *gracious purposes* of heaven.— — — God has “prepared” things which ye have not seen, for them that love him: goodness is “laid up” for them that fear him, and trust in him before the sons of men. Ps. xxxi. 19. Cor. ii. 9. Col. i. 5.

2. It is sown for us in the *mediation of Christ*. All his sorrows are the seeds of joy to us: this is the procuring cause of all our comforts, both here and hereafter. All that he has done and suffered on earth, and all that he is now doing in heaven, will issue in the joy of his people: and what a harvest of light and gladness will arise! Ps. lxxii. 16.

3. In the *promises of God*.— — — The seed is sown, the word is gone out of his lips, and shall not return— — — pardon, preservation, and eternal life. Isa. lv. 11, 12.

3. In the *tears of godly sorrow*.— — — Christ’s sorrows were the seeds of merit, these of meetness; but each will have their fruit.— — — Godly sorrow generally issues in hope and joy, even in this world, and shall end in everlasting life. Ps. cxxvi. 5, 6. Gal. vi. 8.

5. The very *troubles and trials themselves*, under which the righteous groan, being burdened, are the seeds of future joy, and shall work for them a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory. 2 Cor. iv. 17.

1. Let us then be reconciled to affliction, and patiently wait for the light and gladness that will soon arise. Ps. xxx. 5.

2. Under all our trials, let us be chiefly concerned to be “upright in heart,” and all will issue well. Ps. xlix. 14.

3. Wo to the unbeliever: darkness and sorrow are sown for him, and he himself is continually sowing the seeds of eternal misery! Prov. i. 30, 31

THE PLEASURES OF TRUE PIETY.

Prov. iii. 17.—Her ways are ways of pleasantness, and all her paths are peace. (Pr.)

WHATEVER be our age or circumstances in life, pleasure is the object after which the heart of man inspires: but the greater part of earthly enjoyments are unaccompanied with peace. They are surrounded with innumerable snares, and there is death in the cup. The great concern therefore is to enquire after a species of enjoyment, in which these bitter ingredients are not found, and where pleasure and peace are both united. This is found in true religion, and in that only.

I. ILLUSTRATE AND CONFIRM THE TRUTH TAUGHT US IN THE TEXT.

Here we shall notice what are the ways of true religion, and how they are accompanied with pleasure and peace—

1. The first of these ways is the *fear of the Lord*.— — — This is the beginning of wisdom, and of all true religion in the heart.— — — This in now-testament language is the same thing as repentance towards God, and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ.— — — Whatever there may be of religion without this, is not walking in wisdom’s ways. You may read, and hear the word, and attend on means of grace; but you are not in her ways, without repentance and faith; and whatever pleasure you may find in all this, it is altogether spurious.— — — Walking in wisdom’s ways is the beginning of a new life, a setting out for heaven in the path that truth has set before us.

The sorrow of repentance may be bitter for a time, but it is a bitter *sweet*. The pleasure of weeping at the foot of the cross exceeds every other pleasure.— — —The Philippian jailor, amidst all his distress, rejoiced, believing in God. The Eunuch so soon found the truth, than he went on his way rejoicing. Acts viii. 39, xvi. 34. This pleasure is also mingled with solid peace. Rom. v. 1, xv. 13.

2. Another part of wisdom's ways consist in *searching into the mind of God*, or the glorious truths of the everlasting gospel.— — —There is a source of intellectual enjoyment in studying the works of creation: but what a difference in contemplating this subject with and without a God, and the world with and without a providence. But in the gospel we find a greater work than all these. The work of redemption is the richest of all subjects, and engages the attention of angels. Eph. iii. 17.

Here also peace is connected with pleasure: here is a christian feast, and no danger of excess.

3. Another part consists in *walking in Christian fellowship*.— — —And oh how good and how pleasant a thing it is for brethren to dwell together in unity. Ps. cxxxiii.— — —Friendship and affection are the source of true enjoyment amongst rational creatures; and happiness can be found only in proportion as they exist. But religion opens a new source, and presents us with new and additional motives for affection and esteem, and so of pleasure; and by this means it heightens and endears all our attachments. David and Jonathan would not have been so united in soul, but for the influence of religious principle.

Here also is peace. No fear of the union being dissolved by death, but peace and joy may reign for ever.

4. Devoting ourselves to the *interest of Christ*, and laboring by every means in our power to promote it, is another of the ways of true wisdom.— — —If thy heart be with his heart, his interest will be yours; and then you will find pleasure in it, like that of the returning captives. Ps. cii. 14. Or like the builders of Jerusalem, who had a mind to work. Neh. iv. 6.

In this path we shall find peace as well as pleasure: the satisfaction arising from the service of Christ exceeds every other satisfaction.

5. Wisdom leads us in the way of *doing good to mankind in general*.— — —It fills us with compassion for the poor, with sympathy towards the afflicted, and induces us to seek the good of all: and this is the way of true blessedness.— — —A man of an envious or malignant spirit, may find some pleasure in gratifying it, by tormenting others; but he can have no peace. The heart and conscience are at variance.

But to love mankind, and do good, is sweet.

6. *Taking God's will as our rule* in all the affairs of life, and leaving consequences, is another part of wisdom's ways.— — —To do right, and leave it to say, Thou shalt guide me with thy counsel: in all our ways to acknowledge him. Herein true pleasure and peace are found. Beasts of prey may shift for themselves; but the sheep of his pasture must know the shepherd's voice, and follow him. Ps. xxiii. John x.

7. Submitting with *meekness and contentment* to all the appointments of providence.— — —Such was the example of our Saviour; and if we learn of him, we shall find rest to our souls. Half the misery that is in the world arises from discontent.— — —How true then are the words of our text.

II. INFERENCES FROM THE SUBJECT.

1. We may learn from hence, how to estimate the *carnal pleasures* of a wicked world.— — —In all their mirth and levity, in all their dissipation,

do they find pleasure?— — —They may: but have they inward peace? No:—how little therefore does it deserve the name of happiness.

2. How unreasonable are the *objections made to true religion*, as if it were unfriendly to our interests or our happiness.— — —This is one of the deceptions which Satan passes on a deluded world.

3. What reason to *congratulate* those who are walking in wisdom's ways, and who are decided in their hearts for God.— — —The lines have fallen to them in pleasant places, and they have indeed a goodly heritage.— — —Yours also is true enjoyment: be your portion mine.— — —Yours also is only the beginning of pleasure, but the foretaste of what is still to come. Ps. xiv. 11.

4. Hear what the testimony of Wisdom is to all. "This is the way, walk ye in it." Nothing but destruction and misery will be found in any other. Rom. iii. 16—17.

LOVE TO THE NAME OF THE LORD.

Malachi iii. 16.—Then they that feared the Lord, spake often one to another, and the Lord hearkened and heard; and a book of remembrance was written before him, for them that feared the Lord, and that thought upon his name. (Pr.)

WHEN religion is in a low state at any particular period, it is considered as an excuse for the want of holy activity.— — —Many seem to think there is but little hope of doing any thing to purpose; and that if we can but just keep alive in such a Laodicean state of the church, it is all that can be expected.— — —How different the lesson taught us in this passage? In a time of general corruption, when the priests themselves had depraved the law— — —were enemies to true religion— — —and the common people like them— — —there were a few of another spirit.

1. Observe their *character*: they were such as "feared the Lord."— — —While all around them were practical atheists, they felt the importance of true religion.

2. What they *did*: they "spake often one to another."— — —Not content with public opportunities, they sought each other out, stirred one another up, and delighted in each other's good.

3. How their *minds* were employed: "they thought upon his name."— — —Thinking is not opposed to speaking, but to forgetting.— — —The Lord's name was dear to them: they were concerned for its glory, and grieved for its dishonor.

4. What the Lord did *for them*: "he hearkened and heard."— — —They met together privately, as the sorrowful disciples did for fear of the Jews: but there was one that hearkened— — —heard— — —and approved.— — —What is more, it was "written before him"— — —according to the custom of eastern kings, who kept records of all that was done for their honor. Esther vi. 1.

Enquire what is included in our thinking on the name of the Lord— — —and what advantages will arise from it.

I. EXPLAIN WHAT IS MEANT BY THINKING ON THE NAME OF THE LORD IN A WAY THAT HE APPROVES.

This expression is descriptive of the nature of true religion. — — — *What is repentance* towards God, but thinking on his name with grief for having dishonored it. — — — *What is faith* in Christ, but thinking on his name with delight, as revealed in the gospel. — — — *What is love* to God, but thinking on his name affectionately, and with the highest satisfaction.

More especially, it includes an earnest and habitual concern for God's *cause and interest in the world*, and for the spread of the gospel. — — — The name of the Lord is more deeply interested in this, than in all other things besides, and therefore it requires more of our thoughts. — — — When David thought of his name, his heart was set on the prosperity of the Messiah's kingdom. Ps. lxxii. — — — Here God is glorified in the highest — — — the gospel is the overflowing of his blessedness.

More particularly—

1. If we think on the name of the Lord in a way that he approves, *all we do in religion will be directed to his glory*. — — — We may be zealous in holy duties—praying, reading, hearing the word—with a view to our own name. — — — This is not religion, but mere vanity. — — — In the conduct of Mary, Zachariah, and Elizabeth, we see how dead they were to their own honor, and how alive to the glory of God. Their souls did magnify the Lord, and rejoice in God their Saviour. — — — John also was willing to decrease, that the Saviour might increase. This only is true religion.

2. If we think on the name of the Lord, *we shall reckon no sacrifice too great for it*. — — — He who has but little affection for his holy name, will think much of what he gives — — — much of what he does to promote its glory — — — and much of what he may suffer on account of it. — — — The opposite of all this is true religion. Acts xxi. 13.

3. It implies that *we seek our own spiritual advantage in subordination to it*. — — — Many are coming and going to the house of God, merely to get comfort and cannot find it. — — — Primitive christians sought first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness — — — cultivated a public spirit — — — laid themselves out for usefulness — — — and were filled with joy and peace in believing. — — — They thought of nothing but Christ, and his name. This was the substance of their doctrine — — — the life of their religion — — — the source of all their enjoyments. — — — Hence they had no distressing doubts and fears. If we take care of God's honor, he will take care of our peace.

II. OBSERVE IN WHAT MANNER GOD REMEMBERS THOSE WHO REMEMBER HIM, OR THINK UPON HIS NAME.

God is not unmindful of any of his creatures, nor does he need a book of remembrance; but he will think of those to do them good, who think of him.

1. The Lord generally employs those who *love his name* as instruments in *promoting its glory*. — — — All the great things that have been done in the church, have been done by characters of this description. — — — Those that honor me, I will honor: but wo to the idol shepherd. Zech. xi. 17.

2. In seeing his holy name glorified, they find *their own reward*. — — — The pleasure of the Lord shall prosper in their hand: what else is their hope or joy. 1 Thess. ii. 19, 20.

3. Their labors shall be *remembered for good* in this life, and even when they are gone to their grave. — — — They are of one heart with God: their zeal is united with his zeal, and their labors shall not be in vain in the Lord. — — — The seed sown shall spring up, and future generations shall bless their memory.

4. *At the last day* the Judge will bring forth the book that was written before him, and read it in the presence of an assembled world. Matt. xxv. 21—23. Heb. vi. 10.

1. There is no true religion but where the name of the Lord is loved and adored.

2. No hope of being useful in the cause of God without a portion of this spirit.

BLESSEDNESS OF SPIRITUALITY.

Romans viii. 6.—But to be spiritually minded is life and peace. (Pr.)

EXPERIENCE teaches us, that our greatest happiness consists in drawing near to God; that the love of God is its own reward; yet how prone are we to live at a distance from him.

There are some, however, in whom this spirituality wholly prevails: as among the blessed above, where all is life and peace.— — —In this world it prevails only in part, even in the best of men. We have much carnality within us: all our powers, principles, and actions are infected by it.— — —Yet if we have any true religion, we are in some degree spiritually minded. We mind the things of the Spirit, and walk after the Spirit.— — —This is essential to denominate us christian.

Consider wherein this spirituality consists—and the blessedness connected with it.

I. EXPLAIN WHAT IT IS TO BE “SPIRITUALLY MINDED.”

This subject, like some others in religion, is better felt than described. experience here is the best teacher.

1. To be spiritually minded is to have a *discernment of the holy beauty and excellence of heavenly objects.*— — —Spiritual things are spiritually discerned. 1 Cor. ii. 14. 2 Cor. iv. 6.— — —While in a carnal state, the mind is blinded by pride, by prejudice, by the vanities of the world. It can see no beauty in spiritual objects: the holy character of God possesses no interest. There is no form or comeliness in the Saviour, that we should desire him— — —nothing desirable in the blessings of salvation— — —nothing lovely in the holy law or glorious gospel— — —in the worship, or in the people of God— — —no congeniality between the state of the mind, and the moral excellence of these objects.— — —But a spiritual mind can discern and feel their beauty and their worth: and in proportion to our spirituality, such will be our relish,— — —Nothing contributes more to our understanding and enjoying the Scriptures, than this state of mind. Then it is that we can exclaim with David, as in Psalm cxix. 103. cxxxix. 17.

2. It is such a state of mind as to *live as it were on spiritual enjoyments.* These are its food, and its treasure.— — —The desires of a carnal mind are nourished by carnal and sensual objects: but a spiritual mind is taken up with heavenly delights. The truths of the gospel are the food on which it lives, and the mind is hereby weaned from earthly objects.— — —The affections are now set on things above. Self-denial becomes more easy, and the ills of life are borne with greater patience and fortitude.

3. Spirituality is a state of mind which *delights in spiritual exercises*.— — — reading, hearing, meditation, and prayer.— — — The more spiritually minded we are, the more we shall delight in holy duties, especially in those which are most spiritual; in close dealing with God and our own souls.

4. A spiritual mind will be apt to *turn every thing to spiritual purposes*.— — — It is the property of a carnal mind to convert every thing into carnal purposes; it finds food in every thing to gratify a sensual taste.— — — A worldly minded man does the same; he possesses the unhappy ingenuity of rendering every thing subservient to his worldly interest, and never loses sight of that.— — — A spiritual mind will be similarly disposed towards spiritual things: it derives instruction from every event, finds a sweetness in a thousand objects overlooked by others, like the bee that sips the honey from every flower. — — — It turns all the mercies of God into matter of praise, all his judgments into matter of humiliation, and even the depravity of mankind into pity, lamentation, and self-reflection. It takes food out of the eater, and sweetness out of the strong.

II. THE ADVANTAGES ARISING FROM THIS STATE OF MIND.

It is "life and peace;" in its own nature—in its immediate effects—producing the most heavenly feelings and enjoyments.

1. Spiritual mindedness is accompanied with much *peace with God*.— — — It gives a holy and heartfelt satisfaction, a disposition to rejoice in God, in all his perfections, and in his universal dominion.

2. It is accompanied with much *peace of conscience*.— — — It reconciles us to ourselves, and diffuses a sweet and holy calm. Oh that peace which passeth all understanding: how does it keep the heart and mind through Christ Jesus.

3. It diffuses life and peace under the most *trying circumstances*.— — — It is this which makes our heaviest burdens light, and gives a sweetness to every bitter cup.— — — Patience, humility, and love will all perform their part.

4. It will give life and peace even in a *dying hour*. Then will its advantages more especially be felt.— — — With what sacred peace and calmness did this state of mind enable Jacob to take his leave of the world, Gen. xlix. 18. Zachariah, Luke ii. 29. Paul, 2 Tim. iv. 6.

How important to cultivate this state of mind; by reading, by prayer, by watchfulness, by hearing the word, by delighting in the return of sacred opportunities.

HAPPY STATE OF THE PRIMITIVE CHURCH.

Acts iv. 33.—Great grace was upon them all. (Pr.)

THE power and the glory of the gospel may be seen in looking back on the times of the apostles: and such and more abundantly will be its glory in the latter day. — — — It is peculiarly interesting to behold such a number brought to repentance, by such weak instruments too, and after the cause of Christ had been loaded with reproach by the crucifixion. Oh what a change and what a scene.

It is difficult to give the precise meaning of the text, or to know by what

words to express it. We may form some idea of it by what we have now and then seen in some very eminent christians, and perhaps it is better judged of by comparison than in any other way. If great grace be seen in a minister, it makes his face to shine like that of Moses; or if in a private christian it makes him appear lovely, like one adorned in all the beauties of holiness.

We shall now seek an illustration of the text, by enquiring wherein such eminent grace appeared in these primitive believers.

Oh that by looking back on their conduct, we may be led to mourn over our great deficiency, and see from whence we are fallen, and repent.

1. Great grace appeared in their *earnest and united supplications*. — They had much communion with God in prayer, and this holy exercise was with them habitual. Acts i. 14. — On any extraordinary occasion, if they were in trouble or suffered persecution, prayer was their first and last resort: ch. iv. 31. — When Peter was in prison, prayer was made for him by the whole church, ch. xii. 5: and when Paul and Silas were imprisoned at Philippi, they spent the night in prayer: ch. 25. — When these primitive christians parted from each other they prayed together, though it was on the sea shore: ch. xxi. 5. — They were also much devoted to private prayer, ch. x. 9: and great grace will lead to much intercourse with heaven.

2. It appeared in their *stedfast adherence to the apostle's doctrine*. — Great grace will prepare our hearts to understand the word, for it is that unction which teacheth all things; that which forms and adapts the mind to every part of the gospel. — Indifference to divine truth is always a sign of little grace, or of the total want of it; and it becomes us seriously to enquire whether our hearts are prepared for all we meet with in the apostles' doctrine. — A stedfast continuance in the truth is also a trial of grace. Not a continuance, indeed, in our own belief, because it is our own; for that may be where there is no grace; but to enter into the spirit of the apostles' doctrine, and to abide in it from love.

3. In a constant adherence *to the worship and service of God*. Acts ii. 42, 46. — Real religion was the object of supreme regard, and serving the Lord was their proper element: ch. iv. 46. All hands found some employment. — Peter and Paul viewed the whole world as lying before them, and they longed to go forth in the warfare: and wherever they went they made the service of Christ their proper business, whether on shipboard or in prison. — The History or Acts of the Apostles is full of their labours and travels for Christ; and churches were planted by them in almost every place. Ch. xiii. xiv.

4. In their great *love one to another*. — They were all of one heart and one soul: ch. iv. 32. They had all things common, neither said any of them that ought of the things which he possessed was his own. — This practice, however, continued only for a short time, during a special season of necessity. There were afterwards both rich and poor among them, but still they were of one heart. — Previous to their receiving the gospel they were at enmity with each other, and divided into sects and parties; but now all this was forgotten. Oh how interesting to see what religion can do!

5. These primitive christians were *full of holy joy* and peace in believing, and they triumphed in every place: ch. ii. 46. — Now was that prophecy fulfilled: "Behold, I create Jerusalem a rejoicing, and her people a joy" Samaria also was made glad with the tidings of salvation: ch. viii. 8.

—— They had found the Messiah, had obtained mercy, and now they rejoice in serving him.

6. Their *spirit and deportment* were such as recommended their religion to the world: ch. ii. 47. — They abounded in those christian graces which are lovely even in the eyes of men in general. They were neither surly nor morose, but pitiful, kind and courteous; easy to be entreated, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality, and without hypocrisy. Their conversation was such as becometh the gospel, and they adorned the doctrine of God our Saviour in all things.

What reason have we to mourn, that we so little resemble these holy men — Oh how far do we come short of their ardent zeal, their love to Christ and the souls of men — Yet let us be thankful for a little of that spirit which appeared so eminently in them. — Bless God for the gospel, for the way of salvation, for the ordinances of Christ, for brotherly love and christian fellowship. Lord, increase our faith.

CHRISTIAN COMPASSION.

Hebrews xi. 12, 13.—Wherefore lift up the hands which hang down, and the feeble knees; and make straight paths for your feet, lest that which is lame be turned out of the way; but let it rather be healed. (Pr.)

The defection among the believing Hebrews seems to have arisen in part from the persecutions they met with on account of the gospel. They had been greatly oppressed by their unbelieving countrymen, and though they had not been called to resist unto blood, yet they had suffered “the spoiling of their goods,” in the beginning of their profession. This at first they nobly endured, but afterwards fainted. Like their forefathers in the wilderness, when trouble overtook them, some of them were for going back, and others were disheartened.

The words of the text are taken from Isa. xxxv. 3, 4, and are addressed to the believing Hebrews as an admonition to comfort and encourage one another. The disheartened among them are compared to such as had been running in a race, or sustaining a protracted conflict till their knees began to tremble, and their hands to hang down; and in this condition, those who are strong ought to bear the infirmities of the weak.

I. NOTICE THE RELIGIOUS STATE OF THOSE WHO ANSWER TO THE DESCRIPTION GIVEN IN THE TEXT.

Were we to compare christians in general of the present day with those of the first ages, it would appear that they are grown weak and faint. We have but little of the zeal and activity which characterised the primitive church. The duties of religion are but faintly regarded, our resistance of evil is irresolute and undecided, and our fortitude in trials and adversities bears but little comparison with theirs.

The description, however, is more particularly applicable to certain individual cases and characters amongst us, who need the compassion of their brethren, under their various difficulties and discouragements.

1. Some are ready to faint under difficulties and *troubles of a worldly nature*. — With all their toil, and care, and industry, though they rise up early, and sit up late, and eat the bread of carefulness, they are scarcely

able to go along; and not casting all their care upon him who careth for them, the load becomes too heavy, and they sink beneath the burden. — Y. if we keep near to the Lord, such things may be endured. Some poor people are very happy amidst all their privations, while others are faint and weary in their course.

2. Some are discouraged through distrust, and *groundless fears of future ills*. — In addition to the troubles they already feel, they anticipate future ones which may never come. Thus David, in the former part of life, was rendered perpetually uneasy by the apprehension that he should one day perish by the hand of Saul. — But if we could leave the future with God we should be happy, and by encountering our difficulties only one at a time we should get through them all at last. Matt. vi. 34.

3. Others are distressed not only with the difficulties of life, but from being under *the chastening hand of God*. — They could bear injustice and oppression from the hands of men; but when providence seems to be against them, they are utterly dismayed, and their strength is dried up. Flesh and heart fail them; and not finding sufficient relief in the promises, they faint in the day of adversity. — These things may be borne, however if God be with us; but if left to ourselves, our hands will soon hang down, and our knees be feeble.

4. Some are disheartened by repeated opposition from *the enemies of religion*. — Though the laws of our country do not now admit of open persecution, there is nevertheless a great deal of enmity, reproach and unkindness to be endured oftentimes from friends and near relations for the sake of truth and of a good conscience. — This also may be borne, if we live near to God, and duly estimate the importance of christian principles; otherwise we shall soon grow weary and faint in our minds. It was well with these Hebrews while they were warmly attached to the gospel; but when they began to give that up, their strength failed them.

5. Some are greatly discouraged by *inward conflicts*, arising from the evil propensities of their own hearts. — It is more difficult to sustain this warfare than all the troubles that assail us from without. David could meet his numerous enemies in the field, and was not afraid of ten thousands of his people who set themselves against him; but when compassed about with his own iniquities, his heart utterly failed him, and he was not able to look up. Psal. xl. 12. — Some easily besetting sin, arising from constitution or peculiar circumstances in life, is sufficient to destroy the comfort of a believer, and almost to annihilate his hope. Whether it consists in an inordinate love of the world, or the indulgence of some sordid appetite, it interrupts communion with God, cuts off supplies of grace from above, and so weakens and relaxes all the energies of vital religion. The hands hang down, and the knees are feeble.

6. A *departure from evangelical truth* has weakened the strength of some by the way, and left them shorn of their dignity and glory. — — The relinquishment of any of the leading doctrines of the gospel, or mixing them up with a portion of error, tends as certainly to enfeeble the christian graces, and to destroy the stimulus to holy activity, as the indulgence of sin itself. Gal. v. 7—9. — — If we begin to think less of the evil of sin, if we feel less our need of a divine Redeemer, and cease to go to God by him as lost and perishing sinners; if in this case we are christians at all, we shall soon grow faint and feeble, and exhibit little more than the mere form of godliness.

7. The despondency of some good people arises no doubt from a natural

gloominess in their constitution, which disposes them to dwell on the dark side of every subject, rather than on the other.— — —They think of their own unworthiness, and forget the worthiness of the Saviour. They are overtaken by some temptation, fall into sin, and forget that there is an Advocate with the Father. John ii. 1.— — —Partial or contracted views of the gospel, which hide from us the allsufficiency of Christ, and fix our attention chiefly on ourselves, have a most discouraging tendency. Heb. vii. 25.

II. THE DUTY OF CHRISTIANS TOWARDS ONE ANOTHER UNDER THESE DISCOURAGEMENTS. "LIFT UP THE HANDS WHICH HANG DOWN, AND THE FEEBLE KNEES."

Though this exhortation is chiefly applicable to ministers, whose office it is to strengthen the weak, and to comfort the feeble-minded, it also points out the duty of all christians towards one another.— — —How much soever it may be neglected, it is unquestionably one of the great ends of christian society and fellowship, that we should be helpers of each other's faith and joy in the Lord.

1. In order to perform this duty aright, it is necessary to exercise much *tenderness and forbearance* towards those who are labouring under great discouragements.— — —Let the strong bear the infirmities of the weak, remembering that they are a part of the mystical body of Christ. 1 Cor. xii. 21, 25. The compassionate tenderness of the great Shepherd of the flock, is left as a pattern for our imitation. Isai. xl. 11. Matt. xii. 20.

2. Another way in which our compassion may be exercised is to point out to one another *the directions and consolations of the gospel*, according as the case may require; and here the tongue of the learned is necessary, to speak a word in season to him that is weary.— — —Are any discouraged by outward difficulties? Let them cast all their care on him who careth for them; let them commit their way unto the Lord, and be careful for nothing; but in every thing by prayer and supplication make their request known unto God. He that taketh care for the greater, will take care of the less.— — —Is the hand of the Lord gone out against any of our brethren? Let us relieve their own despondency by pointing out the end to be answered by afflictions; let us remind them of the sufferings of Christ, and of the weight of glory that shall follow.— — —Are any grieved and oppressed by irreligious connections? Remind them of him who endured the contradiction of sinners against himself, lest they be weary and faint in their minds.— — —Are any disheartened and cast down on account of inbred corruption? Tell them to be looking still to Jesus, and to maintain the conflict till death: the God of peace shall bruise Satan under their feet shortly.— — —Does the weakness and faintness of any arise from a partial relinquishment or misconception of the gospel truth? Endeavour to instruct and teach them in all wisdom, restoring them in a spirit of meekness and love.— — —Does discouragement arise from a proneness to view the dark side of things? Turn to them the other side also. God's thoughts are not as our thoughts, nor his ways as our ways.

3. Let us be concerned to *remove the stumbling-block out of the way*, and so to "make straight paths for their feet." It is here intimated that the defection and irregularities of some of these Hebrews, became a stumbling-block to the rest. They had departed in some measure from the simplicity, of the gospel, and so were the occasion of "turning the lame out of the way." — — —If those who have been of longer standing in the church, begin to turn aside, or grow weary in their course, it will discourage the weak, and become a snare to the unwary.— — —In order therefore to heal

and strengthen others, it is needful above all things that we ourselves are found walking humbly with God; a zealous and holy example cannot fail to revive and quicken those who come within its influence. Hos. xiv. 7.

1. Let us learn from hence, that all our difficulties and discouragements in the ways of God arise from ourselves, and from the evil that is in the world. They originate in a departure from God, or from the simplicity of the gospel: and if we keep near to him, nothing can hurt us. His ways are ways of pleasantness, and all his paths are peace.

2. How lovely and how interesting is christian society, whose object it is to strengthen and encourage each other in the way to heaven: and how wretchedly defective must it be, if it has not this tendency.

3. How essential to the christian character are brotherly kindness, charity, and a disinterested but affectionate concern for the spiritual and everlasting welfare of our fellow christians. If their comfort and success be not an object of the tenderest solicitude, we are strangers to the benevolent spirit of the gospel.

TRUE RELIGION THE SOURCE OF JUSTICE AND BENEVOLENCE.

Gen. xlii. 18.—This do and live: for I fear God.

The history of Joseph never fails to be interesting, as often as we read it. Here we have an account of his brethren, coming the first time into Egypt to buy corn. On this occasion he spoke roughly to them, and put them in prison, but afterwards released them. His conduct towards them may be seen in verse 14 to 17.

1. Observe, his design in saying to them, "I fear God," when he committed them to prison, was to convince them that he did not do it wantonly or in cruelty; but that his conduct in this instance was regulated by the purest motives, and that they had no reason to expect any injustice at his hands.

2. What an effect it must have had on them, to find that there was a man in Egypt who feared the God of their fathers; a man too in a high and honorable station, and who was lord over all the land.— — They themselves had lived in a religious family, and did not fear him.

3. Notice the connexion there is between fearing God, and dealing justly and mercifully with men. This has been verified in all ages; true religion is the parent of humanity, and of genuine benevolence.

I. INQUIRE WHAT IS INCLUDED IN THE FEAR OF GOD.

This term is descriptive of the whole of true religion, which is thus frequently expressed in various parts of the Old Testament.— — If Joseph had lived in gospel times, he would probably have said, "I believe in Christ;" and the meaning is much the same.

Religion however does not consist in slavish fear or dread of the Almighty. in trying to please him as a hard master, or in praying to avert his vengeance. These are the feelings of an idle unprofitable servant, and not of a true believer.

But true religion is called the fear of God, because

1. It chiefly consists in a sacred and solemn dread of the Supreme Being; deep and reverential regard for his holy name, his worship, and authority

— — —Its tendency is to fill the mind with mingled sentiments of love and awe: where this is wanting, there is no genuine religion.

2. True piety produces tenderness of conscience, as one of its principal fruits and evidences— — —a fear to neglect what God requires, or to trifle with his commands, as well as the dread of doing what he has forbidden.

— — —It is therefore with infinite propriety that all true religion is called the fear of the Lord.

3. Though under the gospel, fear is not the predominant spirit of believers, but love and joy; yet even there it is necessary, and neither love nor joy, nor any other part of true religion can exist without it.— — —We are exhorted to perfect holiness "in the fear of God," and this must accompany our highest joys.— — —This is the great preservative, both against presumption and despair. Heb. xii. 28.

II. CONSIDER ITS INFLUENCE ON OUR CONDUCT TOWARDS MEN: "This do, and live; for I fear God."

It is a fact well known in former times, that where the fear of God was not, there was no security for justice and mercy towards men. Hence the conduct of Abraham, when he came to Abimelech at Gerar. Gen. xx. 11.

This also is true of magistrates, and public rulers in general.— — —Hence the conduct of the unjust judge, mentioned by our Lord, Luke xviii.

4.— — —Even David, when he had lost his tenderness of conscience towards God, became cruel to Uriah, and also to the Amorites. 2 Sam. xii. 31.

On the contrary, where the fear of God prevails, there we shall find justice and humanity towards men: the kings of Israel were on this account esteemed to be merciful men. 1 Kings xx. 31.

As masters, it will make us kind; as parents, tender: as friends, faithful; as members of society, peaceable and well-disposed.

And how is this to be accounted for?

1. True religion, or the fear of God, impresses the mind with a sense of its accountableness. Without this, a man considers only himself; with it, a king will feel that he has a King above him; and a master, that he also has a Master in heaven.— — —Under this conviction, those who have little to fear from others, will fear God; and their conduct in the highest stations will be regulated by it. Neh. v. 15.— — —The principle that makes us feel that we are stewards, and must shortly give an account, is above all others adapted to inspire us with the love of justice and benevolence.

2. The fear of God will render us sensible of our own faults and failings, and of our need of mercy.— — —Such will be quickly aware that they owe ten thousand talents, and cannot therefore think of taking a fellow servant by the throat, and saying, Pay me what thou owest. Genuine religion will impart to us a spirit of meekness and kindness, and make us ready to forgive. Thus also it wrought in Joseph.

3. The fear of God is mixed with holy love: such therefore who possess this principle, will feel benevolently towards all that bear the divine image — — —whether as creatures, who are formed after his natural likeness, or as those who bear a resemblance to his moral nature.

1. We may from hence learn in what way we may hope to see the general state and condition of the world ameliorated: each man truly to fear God, and all the rest will follow of course.

2. We are here furnished with a rule for self-examination: the criterion of all genuine piety is the fear of God, disposing us to the exercise of justice and mercy towards men.

3. Whether we fear God or not, we are in his hands: by him we must be judged, and he will reward every man according to his works.

APOSTLES' PRAYER.

Luke xvii. 5.—The apostles said unto the Lord, Increase our faith. (Pr.)

The occasion of this prayer seems in this place to be the exhortation previously delivered, and which required the performance of a difficult duty, ver. 4. In this view it is highly proper, as faith is the grand moving principle by which every holy duty is performed. But whatever were the immediate occasion, the prayer itself is adapted to every part of the christian life.

I. CONSIDER THE GENERAL IMPORT OF THE PRAYER: "LORD, INCREASE OUR FAITH."

1. Faith has respect to *revealed truth*, as its immediate object; and in the New Testament it more especially relates to Christ, as the substance of all the promises.— — —He was the great object in whom they believed. Thus Peter's confession, "We believe and are sure that thou art that Christ, the Son of the living God."— — —Faith in the all-sufficiency of Christ is that to which the promise of miraculous healing was addressed: "Believest thou that I am able to do this? If thou canst believe, all things are possible."— — —It was this which failed the disciples in the hour of danger: "Oh ye of little faith." Matt. viii. 26.

2. In praying for an increase of this principle, the apostles acknowledged that *their faith was weak*.— — —So indeed it appeared in a time of trial; and so does ours too frequently, if the strength of faith, as well as its genuineness, is to be judged of by its fruits.

3. In praying for more faith, they also acknowledged *their own insufficiency* to produce it.— — —Faith is indeed our duty, and unbelief a sin; but like every thing else that is truly good, it is all of grace: and it is God that worketh all our works in us. Ephes. ii. 8. Phil. ii. 13.

4. In directing their prayer to Christ, they virtually *acknowledge his divinity*.— — —To give or to increase faith is more than any mere creature can accomplish. A minister may offer evidence for the truth to be believed: but he can neither impart faith, nor increase it.— — —Christ alone is the author and the finisher of faith. Heb. xii. 5.

5. This prayer might in some measure be answered at the time, but was more especially so after our Lord's ascension.— — —When he came to the crown, he blessed his followers: he gave gifts unto men, and an abundance of his Holy Spirit. Acts ii. 33.

II. THE REASONS WHICH RENDER THIS PRAYER SUITABLE TO ALL CHRISTIANS.

If we are truly the followers of Christ, yet our faith is weak at best, and needs to be increased, and that for various reasons—

1. On account of its influence in obtaining *other spiritual blessings*; for they are bestowed according to the measure of faith.— — —In performing *miraculous cures*, our Lord always looked at this. Many looked at worldly distinctions, but he did not: his eye was on the faith of the party. Matt. ix. 2. Acts xiv. 9, 10.— — —When he hesitated, it was for unbelief. Mark ix. 23, 24.— — —It is so in the bestowment of *spiritual blessings*: they are given in answer to the prayer of faith. Psal. xxxi. 19. Mark xi. 24.— — —The answer to successful prayer will also be found to be of this description. Gen. xxxii. 26.

2. Its influences under *dark and trying providences*.— — —Nothing but faith can sustain us under them. Ps. xcvi. 2. What could Jacob have done

but for the influence of faith? "I will surely do thee good," the promise said: yet nothing but evil appeared. ——— What could he have done afterwards, when his children seemed to be taken away, in whom the promises were to be fulfilled? ——— What could the pious captives have done in Babylon, had they not been sustained by faith in the divine word. Hab. ii. 3. ——— What could we do amidst dark and threatening providences, and when Zion is covered with a cloud, were it not for the support which faith derives from the promises?

3. Its influence on the *deep mysteries of divine truth*, which faith only can receive and apply. Truth is like a deep fountain, and faith is the only means of drawing from it: it lies far beyond the reach of the carnal mind, and even of the greater part of modern christians. ——— The doctrine of Christ crucified, of God manifest in the flesh, and the wondrous extremes which meet in the person and work of Christ, are like an immense ocean. The powers of reason could do nothing here; and reason, if she attempted to fathom it, would soon be drowned. — — — But faith is like a little bark, borne along the mighty waves, and conducts us safely into harbour. — — — The only enquiry of a true believer is, hath God said it? Then I receive it: Lord, increase our faith!

4. Our *spiritual enjoyments*, as they are derived wholly from the promises, are proportioned to the degree of faith. — — — The consolations themselves are no less now than in primitive times. Christ is the same yesterday, to day and forever: the gospel is the same, our prospects are the same. If our enjoyments are not the same, it is owing to the want of faith — — — What christians might we be, had we but more of this! Instead of God's house being a house of mourning, it would be a house of joy: instead of dragging on heavily, we should run in the way of his commandments with enlargedness of heart: instead of fretting under the frowns of the world, we should rejoice in every tribulation. Rom. v. 2, 3. — — — The promises are full for this life, as well as for that which is to come. We only want faith to realize and enjoy what God has given us in his word.

4. The influence of faith *on our life and conduct*, renders this prayer peculiarly suitable and important. — — — Without faith it is impossible to please God: nothing is done right, nothing is acceptable. Where it is weak, and mixed with much unbelief, it will leave us lifeless and inactive. — — — This also is the case where any of the leading doctrines of the gospel are doubted or denied. The Galatians ceased to run well, when their minds had been corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ. Gal. v. 7, 15, 16 — — — On the contrary, where faith is lively, all will be alive. Heb. xi. — — — The disciples in our Lord's life time believed a little, and did a little: but afterwards how great the difference! — — — As preachers and as hearers, in prosperity and in adversity, faith in God is the life of all activity, and of submission to his will.

6. Its importance *in the hour of death*, renders it unspeakably desirable. — — — We know nothing of hereafter but by faith: with much of this we shall be prepared to meet the last enemy, and shall even desire to be offered up. Lord increase our faith! 2 Tim. i. 2.

COMMUNION OF SAINTS.

Romans: 12.—That I may be comforted together with you, by the mutual faith both of you and me. (Pr.)

THE communion of saints was esteemed of such importance amongst early christians, as to make it an article of faith; and where the spirit of it is preserved it still forms a charming part of the christian religion.

Our text gives us a brief description of it. Paul longed to see the christians at Rome, having as yet only heard of them by report. When going up to Jerusalem, he observed, he went not knowing the things that should befall him there, save that in every place bonds and afflictions awaited him. He wished to go to Rome, but little thought of being sent thither as a prisoner. In this epistle written from Corinth, he proposed taking them in his way to Spain, and promised himself much satisfaction in the interview. His hope was, that their mutual faith would be a comfort to each other.

I. ENQUIRE WHAT THERE IS IN THE FAITH OF MINISTERS TO COMFORT PRIVATE CHRISTIANS.

When christians see their minister, they expect to hear something concerning “the faith;” and Paul takes it for granted it would be so with these christians at Rome.

Now there are three things in the faith of the ministers of the gospel, which tend to comfort the minds of the godly—

1. Its being *scriptural and decided*. — If the faith which we preach were antiscritptural, it might comfort the sinner and the hypocrite, but not the real christian; to him it would be matter of grief. — If we dwelt in speculations, it might amuse and interest an ingenious mind; but there would be no solid food for the godly. — Now the apostles were decided: they spoke what they believed and were assured of, and had not followed cunningly-devised fables; and it is this in the ministry of the word now, which affords comfort. — To see a minister decided on scriptural grounds, speaking the things of which he himself has been fully assured, is to see a guide who is well acquainted with his way, or a pilot who is conversant with his chart. — The opposite of this is distressing. — To see a guide stumbling in the dark, not knowing truth from error, but who now tells you this is the way and then that, and is at a loss to know what he should believe, must excite fear and distrust, and not comfort. — But Paul’s gospel was not yea and nay; but yea and amen in Christ Jesus. 2 Cor. i. 17—20.

2. Its being given them not for themselves only, but as *a public trust to be imparted*, renders it a source of comfort to believers. — In this respect Paul considered himself as “a debtor,” both to the wise and the unwise: ver. 14. — He was entrusted with the “unsearchable riches of Christ,” not for his own use merely, but that he might proclaim them among the Gentiles as an almoner. Eph. iii. 8. — He himself was poor, yet making many rich: he was afflicted and persecuted, in order that he might comfort others. 2 Cor. i. 6; vi. 10.

3. Its being a *living principle in their own souls*; the truth on which they live, and have ventured their own eternal all. 1 Tim. iv. 6. — Without an experimental acquaintance with the truth, there would be very little to edify and comfort others, whatever might be our attainments and gifts in other respects. — Its coming from the heart makes it interesting to the hearts of others: hence it is that an experimental ministry yields comfort to real christians, and no other ministry can do it. 1 Thess. i. 5, 6.

II. NOTICE WHAT THERE IS IN THE FAITH OF PRIVATE CHRISTIANS TO COMFORT THE MINISTERS OF CHRIST.

It is necessary that they should receive comfort, as well as impart it: and the faith of christians tends to do this, and that for the following reasons--

1. It furnishes them with *sentiments and feelings* in their preaching, which nothing else could do. ——— A believing, spiritual, attentive, and affectionate auditory, whose souls are engaged, tend to inspire thought and feeling in the preacher, which no previous preparation could excite. ——— So on the contrary, when unbelief, carelessness, or conceit appears, it tends to chill the soul, which is like a vessel confined in port for want of a gale. Heb. v. 11.

2. In the faith of private christians also we see the *travail of our Redeemer's soul*, and this gives us comfort. ——— If we love him, we cannot but rejoice in the success of his gospel. Every other consideration is of very inferior importance compared with this, however agreeable our circumstances may be.

3. In it we see also the *fruit of our own labors*; an answer to many prayers, and to many endeavors for the good of others. ——— This is highly encouraging to a faithful minister; and without it he spends his strength in vain. Isa. xlix. 4. Gal. iv. 19. 1 Thess. ii. 19.

4. In it we see the *pledge of your salvation*; and in proportion as we love your souls, this must comfort us. ——— As fellow creatures, as friends, as the relatives of dear friends, we cannot but love you: to see therefore the evidence of your conversion and salvation, is our highest enjoyment and reward. 1 Thess. ii. 8. 3 John 4.

III. WHAT THERE IS IN THE COMMON FAITH OF BOTH TO COMFORT ONE ANOTHER.

Common blessings are the best of blessings; and those blessings which ministers possess, not as ministers, but as christians in common with the rest, are the best of all. ——— What Paul desired for his own soul, is common to the meanest christian. Phil. iii. 8.

Now there are three things in the common faith of both ministers and christians, which tend to their mutual comfort—

1. *Its unity*. ——— Those who have never seen each other's faces in the flesh, yet when they come to converse together, will soon find their hearts to be one. ——— Paul had often felt thus, even when at a distance from christian friends. Col. ii. 5. ——— But he would feel much more from a personal interview; and hence he longed to see these believing Romans. that he might be comforted by "the mutual faith" of one another.

2. The *interesting nature of the truth believed*, has this tendency. ——— "This is a faithful saying, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners—God was manifest in the flesh—God so loved the world." ——— It is from the belief of this gospel, that there is now no condemnation. Hence we become the sons of God, and hence the hope of eternal life. ——— These are things of the utmost importance; and being such, like a company of strangers who find themselves all embarked in the same ship, and going together, the mutual belief of them affords mutual comfort.

2. The promised *presence of Christ*, which attends such meetings of the godly for communion with each other, furnishes another source of mutual enjoyment. ——— It is only where Christ meets with his people, that real happiness can be found.

REFLECTIONS.

1. Learn the necessity of *faith in Christ*, in order to christian communion. Unbelievers, or mere nominal christians, possess no fitness for it:

there is neither any bond of union, nor any medium of receiving or imparting christian comfort.

2. The necessity of *communicating* faith, in order to enjoy the benefit of christian fellowship. — That kind of discourse which tends to explain and render truth interesting, is of importance in promoting both the union and comfort of the godly.

3. If the fellowship of saints on earth be so desirable, what will it be *in heaven*; where no darkness will be felt, no discords, no calamities, no painful separations shall take place any more!

THE BLESSEDNESS OF FOLLOWING CHRIST.

John viii. 12.—I am the light of the world: he that followeth me, shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life. (Pr.)

THERE were many pretended lights in the world, as there are now, and many who followed those wandering stars: but Christ is the origin of all true intelligence, the fountain of light and life to all his people. Like the lesser planets, they borrow all their light from him; while he alone is as the mid-day sun.

I. CONTEMPLATE THE CHARACTER WHICH OUR LORD ASSUMES: "I am the light of the world."

The Jews objected to it, and do still object, ver. 13; and if he were a mere prophet, as some have said, and only a man, though inspired, the assumption in the text would indeed be inadmissible.

Our Lord not only distinguished himself from all false lights, and false prophets, but from all the servants of God that ever came before him, as in John i. 7—9. — — They only shone with borrowed rays: his light is original and undervied. — — Their light was confined to time and place: his is universal, "the light of the world." Jews and Gentiles, rich and poor, learned and ignorant, all derive their light from him: those under the Old Testament, and those under the New.

More particularly—

1. Christ's being the light of the world means *what he is to others, as revealed in the gospel*. — — The divine nature is sometimes expressed by this term, as when it is said, "God is light, and in him is no darkness at all:" but here it denotes what Christ is to the world. — — If the light had been confined to his personal appearance, the sun would have been set when he left the earth. Instead of this, the light shone still brighter after his ascension than before: and it shall continue to shine, still more and more, unto the perfect day.

2. Christ as revealed in the gospel, sheds a light on *the character and designs of God*. — — But for him, we should have known but little of his moral attributes; it is the Son that has "declared him," and it is in his face that we behold the glory of the Lord. John i. 18, xvii. 26; 2 Cor. iv. 6.

By the law written on our hearts we might have known something of the justice of God, and seen the terror of his majesty, sufficient to inspire us with dread, at the thought of appearing before him: but this would have been all. Whereas now, we see him gracious and glorious, a just God and yet a Saviour: glorified in the highest, and sending peace on earth.

3. The revelation of Christ casts a light on *the former dispensations*. — — — How dark and inexplicable would have been the types and shadows of the law, the prophecies and providences attending the Jewish church, had they not been followed by the doctrine of the cross. — — — The disciples themselves were all in the dark, till Jesus opened their understandings, and expounded to them all things written in the law and the prophets concerning himself. Luke xxiv. 25—27.

4. The doctrine of Christ affords the clearest discovery of *the way of a sinner's salvation*, so that it is now traced as with a sunbeam. — — — That faithful saying of Paul's, "that Christ came into the world to save sinners," casts more light on this subject than all the labors of man could possibly have effected. — — — Philosophy did nothing towards it. Even old testament believers saw only as through a glass darkly: but in the gospel we behold it all with open face. — — — Now, how clearly is the way of life revealed. The word is nigh thee, in thy mouth: and in thy heart: believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved.

II. CONSIDER THE BLESSEDNESS OF THOSE WHO FOLLOW HIM: "they shall not walk in darkness, but have the light of life."

1. "Walking" implies that *life is a journey*. We are not at home, but travelling to another world. — — — There are many ways that lead to death, and but one that leads to endless life: hence the great importance of having the true light to guide us.

2. The promise implies that *many walk in darkness*, even all that follow not this light. — — — They go on stumbling, not knowing the way, nor whither they are going: all is doubtfulness, and dreadful uncertainty.

3. Those who follow Christ shall have *the light of life*, even that which not only illuminates, but cheers and quickens them along the road.

"Following" Christ supposes our believing on him. It is to follow him as the Shepherd of the flock, as disciples follow their Master; or rather, as a traveller who sees the light and follows after it, like the children of Israel who were guided by the pillar of fire through the wilderness.

1. Compare their state with that of *the heathen world*. They know nothing of the way, nor whither they are going; but vainly imagine that when they leave the world, they shall transmigrate into other bodies. But Christians know the way. John xiv. 3, 4.

2. Compare their state with that of merely *nominal Christians*, who know not the way, nor whither they are going, notwithstanding the objective light with which they are surrounded.

3. In comparison of such as *follow Christ partially*, and not wholly, they may be said not to walk in darkness. — — — Some are blown about with every wind of doctrine, and are always at sea, without a compass or a guide.

In order to follow this light, we must be convinced of our own ignorance and need of a guide. Pride and unbelief have darkened the understanding, and those who think they see are made blind. John ix. 39—41.

PRIVILEGES OF CHRIST'S FLOCK.

John x. 9.—I am the door : by me if any man enter in, he shall be saved ; and shall go in and out, and find pasture. (Pr.)

Were we to enquire which is the true church ; who are the ministers of Christ, and which is the way of salvation ; we may learn it from this chapter. — The Jews indeed pretended that they only were the people of God ; that their priests were the only ministers, and that salvation was confined to them. — But our Lord shows that those only are the true church which are his sheep, and who enter in by him ; that those only are true shepherds who believe in him, and lead sinners to him ; and that this is the way of salvation.

I. THE CHARACTER OF THOSE WHO TRULY BELONG TO THE FLOCK OF CHRIST.

They are such as enter in by Christ, "the door" of the sheepfold ; that is, by *faith* in him. Many have entered in by *birth* : they were born in a christian land, and so are called christians. Thus it was with the Jews, who rested on their being the children of Abraham. — Others have entered into the fold by a mere *profession* of christianity : but coming in by "the door" is essential to our being Christ's sheep. All professions of religion come to nothing where this is wanting. John xiv. 6.

What is it then to enter in by "the door ?" In general, it is to embrace Christ ; to receive the truth in love, and that in three respects—

1. It is to embrace Christ *exclusively*, to the rejection of every other way of salvation. The way of salvation by the cross of Christ, is the great offence to the world ; but he is "the door," and there is no other way of entering into eternal life. — Other things may be dispensed with, but this is indispensable : we may differ in minor matters and may agree to differ : but "what think ye of Christ ;" is a question of vital importance.

This has been the way of salvation from the *beginning*. All the promises made to the fathers included Christ : the promise of the woman's Seed — of the Seed to Abraham, and all nations being blessed in him — the blessings promised to David in the everlasting covenant, had an immediate reference to Christ, and he was the substance of them all.

There is no other way of admission but by *faith in him*, as an atoning Saviour. This was clearly taught by the distinction made in the offerings of Cain and Abel, and this difference was observed throughout the whole of the Mosaic economy. — There is no other way *now* : the concurrent language of the new testament is, "He that hath the Son, hath life ; and he that hath not the Son of God, hath not life." John-iii. 36. 1 John v. 12

2. It is to embrace Christ *practically*, so as really to "enter in" by the door into the sheepfold. This is to be doers of the word, and not hearers only. — Many stand and lie about the door, who never enter in : they think of it, but do not like such a narrow way, or they put it off to some other time. — To such however he is still a door of hope, and a refuge to the lost.

3. It implies that we do it *socially*. In entering in by the door, we enter into the fold among the sheep, and become one with God's people.

II. THE PROMISE MADE TO SUCH : "THEY SHALL BE SAVED."

The great question with a fallen creature is, What shall I do to be saved ? And this is the answer : Christ is the way, and you must embrace him as such : there is no other way.

Consider its importance—

1. *We are lost*, whether we be saved or not. — As a sheep upon the mountains is lost from the shepherd and the flock, so are we lost; and should never find the way to God, but should wander and perish for ever. Isai. liii. 6. Ezek. xxxiv. 11, 12.

2. If we be not saved, *our loss will be incalculable*. Our sins are upon our head, and we must die in the pit. — Other losses may be estimated, but this cannot: what shall a man give in exchange for his soul.

3. *If we be saved*, the good will be inestimable. It is salvation with eternal glory. — It includes not only deliverance from all evil, but the enjoyment of all good. 1 Cor. ii. 9.

III. THE PRIVILEGES WHICH SUCH ENJOY IN THIS WORLD: “they go in and out, and find pasture.”

1. Observe, those who have once entered in by the door into the sheepfold, *will go in again and again*. — — The same gospel that first quickened us, will quicken us afterwards: the same food that first fed us, will still be our meat and drink. John vi. 64, 68.

2. Those who are in Christ, have *rich pastures* provided for them: the word and ordinances of God’s house, and the green pastures in which he leads them for his name’s sake. Psal. xxiii. 2. Cant. i. 7. Isai. xlix. 10.

3. They have *free and secure access* to them, under the care of the great Shepherd; who guards their souls from beasts of prey, and will cause them to lie down in safety. Ezek. xxxiv. 13—15.

1. Let us learn the great importance of coming to Christ, and taking his yoke upon us: let us beware we do not stop short of this.

2. See to it that our religion has a right beginning; that we enter in by “the door,” and in no other way.

CHRISTIAN HOPE AND CONSOLATION.

2 Timothy i. 12.—I know whom I have believed, and I am persuaded that he is able to keep that which I have committed unto him against that day. (Pr.)

PAUL was at this time a prisoner at Rome, and in the immediate prospect of martyrdom. But he was not ashamed of the cause in which he suffered, nor afraid of death in its most terrific forms: ch. i. 8. iv. 6. Oh how enviable was his situation! Some men desire to die great, that their names may live; or rich, that their families may be distinguished. But after all, who would not join with Balaam here; “Let me die the death of the righteous, and let my last end be like his!”

The general import of the words before us is, that Paul well knew the ground on which he stood, and felt satisfied in it.—He does not speak of himself as an apostle, but as a christian; and therefore what he says is applicable to all who believe in Jesus.

1. VIEW THE GROUND OF THE CHRISTIAN’S HOPE AND CONSOLATION; “I know whom I have believed”—

Paul stood firm and happy here, and many others have done the same: let us see wherein this confidence consists—

1. It arises from *a consciousness* that we believe in Christ, and have committed our souls into his hands, as a sacred trust until that day. — — — Much

is made of faith in the Scriptures; and what is it? It is to give credit to, or to receive the testimony of another; and as the testimony of Jesus respects himself as the only way of salvation, we cannot credit him without confiding or trusting in him. The words of Paul therefore are the same as if he had said, "I know whom I have *trusted*." — — — We may believe the testimony of Peter or Paul, but Christ alone is the object of our confidence: hence it is explained by "committing" a trust into his hands.

Can you remember *the time* when first convinced of your guilty and undone condition, and of salvation being in no other; and when you first began to trust in him and commit all to him? — — — Or if not the time, you are conscious that you have *no other hope*: it is not once only, but often, that you have committed your soul into the hands of the Saviour.

2. This comfort arises from the persuasion that *Christ is all-sufficient* for the purposes for which you have reposed your trust in him. — — — The text does not so much relate to the act, as to the object of faith. Paul was not thinking so immediately of his believing, though of that he was conscious, as of him in whom he believed: and this is the principal source of consolation.

It greatly concerns us to know in whom we have put our trust: none but real christians enjoy this satisfaction. — — — Others do not know where their trust is: they trust in they know not what, and know not whom. — — — Some in their idols, some in departed saints, others in their own supposed goodness: but all this is trusting in they know not what, and know not whom.

Let us then consider Jesus, and his all-sufficiency, as the exclusive ground of the christian's hope —

1. It is that Saviour to whom *all the prophets* have borne witness: the seed of the woman, the seed of Abraham—the Son of David. — — — He of whom Isaiah wrote, whose glory he foresaw, and whose sufferings he foretold. John xii. 41. Acts x. 43. Rom. ix. 5. 1 Pet. i. 10, 11.

2. Jesus is that Saviour in whom *all the godly* in all ages have put their trust, and have looked to him alone for salvation. Acts iv. 12; Heb. xi. 13. All the martyrs, all the good men we have ever known, put their trust in this almighty Saviour; and it affords the highest satisfaction to feel ourselves on the same ground.

3. It is him who in the fulness of time came into the world, and lived and *died for us*. This is the foundation that God hath laid in Zion, and our hopes are founded on a rock. 1 Cor. iii. 11; 1 Pet. ii. 6.

4. A Saviour who may be depended on for *his all-sufficiency* to save. His proper divinity renders him the object of our highest confidence: "He is able to keep that which we commit to him." — — — He also has an acquired ability, and an official authority, to save unto the uttermost, all that come unto God by him. Heb. vii. 25.

5. He is one that may be depended on for *his veracity* and truth. You may safely trust him, for he is the Amen, the faithful and true witness. — — — We know whom we have trusted: trust him, oh ye perishing sinners.

6. He is one *whose love* is equal to his power. What he can do he will do. — — — He speaks with great affection to those who have committed themselves to him. They are given to him of God, as well as by their own voluntary surrender: and of this sacred charge he says, "I will lose nothing, but will raise it up at the last day." — — — He will also present them faultless before the presence of his glory with exceeding joy. John vi. 39. Jude 24.

II. THE IMPORTANCE OF ENJOYING THIS CONSOLATION UNDER ALL THE TRIALS OF LIFE, AND MORE ESPECIALLY IN THE NEAR APPROACH OF DEATH.

Paul felt it in his imprisonment, and therefore he was "not ashamed;" and as one who was now ready to be offered up, he knew whom he had trusted.

1. If the ground we stand on be *not firm*, at death we must sink forever. It is dreadful to be at a loss then, not knowing in whom we have believed, or where we have placed our trust.

3. Death often comes *unawares*, or if not, that is not a time for thought. Our house requires to be set in order, but much more our souls to be committed into safe hands.

3. Where this is the case, death is disarmed of its terrors, and we may join in the song of victory. 1 Cor. xv. 55—57.

HUNGERING AND THIRSTING AFTER RIGHTEOUSNESS.

Matt. v. 6.—Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness; for they shall be filled. (H. H.)

MEN naturally desire happiness: but they know not in what it is to be found. The philosophers of old wearied themselves in vain to find out what was man's chief good. But our blessed Lord has informed us wherein it consists: it is found in holiness alone; which, when embodied, as it were, and exercised in all its branches, renders us completely blessed. In this sense we understand the words of our text; wherein are set forth,

I. THE DISTINCTIVE CHARACTER OF A CHRISTIAN—

It is a gross perversion of Scripture to interpret this passage as relating to the righteousness of Christ: for though it is true that every Christian desires to be clothed in that righteousness, and shall, in consequence of that desire, obtain his wishes, yet it is not the truth contained in the words before us: they certainly relate to that inward righteousness which every Christian must possess, and to that "holiness, without which, no man shall see the Lord."

Now the character of every Christian is, that he desires holiness,

1. Supremely—

Other desires are not eradicated from the human breast: the natural appetites remain after our conversion the same as before, except as they are restrained and governed by a higher principle. In proportion, indeed, as religion gains an ascendant in the soul, those words will be verified, "He that eateth and drinketh of the water that Christ will give him, shall never thirst." John iv. 14. But from the very commencement of the Divine life, all earthly things sink in the Christian's estimation, and are accounted as dung and dross in comparison of the Divine image. In this sense "Christ is all" to him, Col. iii. 11.*: and he can say, "Whom have I in heaven but thee? And there is none upon earth that I desire in comparison of thee."

2. Constantly—

While other desires remain in the heart, they will of course occasionally rise in opposition to the better principle: but the prevailing desire of the soul is after holiness. "The flesh may lust against the spirit and seem for

* Christ here means the image of Christ.—

a moment to triumph over it: but "the spirit will lust and strive against the flesh," Gal. v. 17. till it has vanquished its rebellious motions. The needle may be driven by violence from its accustomed position: but its attractions are ever towards the pole; and it will never rest till it has resumed its wonted place. Its momentary diversion serves but to prove its fixed habitual inclination. In like manner, temptation itself, in rousing up the soul to action, calls forth its heavenly tendencies, and displays the holy energies with which it is endued.

3. Insatiably—

Every other desire may be satiated; but the more of spiritual nourishment we receive, the more will our hunger and thirst after it be increased. St. Paul himself could not sit down contented; but forgetting what he had attained, he reached forth for higher degrees of holiness. Phil. iii. 13. It is only "when we awake up after the perfect likeness of our God, that we shall be satisfied with it." Ps. xvii. 15.

Truly enviable will this state appear, if we consider,

II. THE BLESSEDNESS ANNEXED TO IT—

To be filled with good and nutritious food is the utmost that the bodily appetite can desire. It is in this sense that we are to understand the promise in the text. The person who hungers and thirsts after righteousness, shall be made,

1. Truly righteous—

There is a negative kind of holiness, which is neither pleasing to God nor profitable to man: it consists merely in an abstinence from open sin, and a discharge of external duties. But real holiness pervades the whole man: it comprehends the whole circle of divine graces: it reaches to the thoughts and desires of the heart; and assimilates us to God in all his communicable perfections. Now this is that with which the true Christian shall be filled: in all his dispositions towards God and man, he shall be changed: he shall not only be delivered from all that would injure his character among men, but shall be "transformed into the very image of his God in righteousness and true holiness."

2. Progressively righteous—

That degree of perfection to which Christians may attain, is not gained at once. All the members of the new man, as well as of the material body, do indeed exist at the moment of our birth: but they are then in a state of infantine weakness: and their arrival at a state of maturity is a gradual work. Now this work shall be advanced in the souls of those who earnestly desire it: "they shall hold on their way, growing stronger and stronger. Job xvii. 9; and like the risen sun, "shining brighter and brighter unto the perfect day." Prov. iv. 18. "The Lord will perfect that which concerneth them," Ps. cxxxviii. 8. and "carry on his work until the day of Christ." Phil. i. 6.

3. Perfectly righteous—

Though absolute perfection is not to be attained in this life, yet every righteous person may expect it, as the completion of his wishes, and the consummation of his bliss. The moment that his soul is released from this frail tabernacle, it shall bid an everlasting farewell to sin and sorrow. The hunger and thirst which characterize him in this world, will then cease for ever: there will remain to him no heights unattained, no wishes unaccomplished: his soul will be "filled" with the desired good, yea, filled to the utmost extent of its capacity.

APPLICATION—

Are there *those who, instead of hungering and thirsting after righteousness, despise it?* Tell me, will ye despise it in the day of judgement? will ye despise it, when ye shall see the difference that is put between the godly and the ungodly? And what is that which ye prefer to it? Can ye say of your pleasures, your riches, or your honours, what our Lord says of righteousness? shall ye certainly be filled with those things? or if ye were, would they ever render you truly blessed? Go, ask of Solomon, or ask of any who have made the experiment; and see whether, in their sober moments, they will not confess those things to be “vanity and vexation of spirit?” O “spend not your money any more for that which is not bread, nor labour for that which satisfieth not; but eat ye that which is good, and let your soul be satisfied with fatness.” Isai. lv. 2, 3.

Are there *those who rest in a form of religion?* Know that it is not the form, but the power, of godliness that God requires. The Pharisees of old abounded in outward duties; but “except your righteousness exceed theirs, ye shall in no case enter into the kingdom of heaven.” That which you must desire, that which you must attain, is an universal change both of heart and life: “you must become new creatures: old things must pass away, and all things become new.”

Are there *any discouraged because of the small proficiency they have made in holiness?* Doubtless this is a matter of lamentation to the best of men. If indeed we are excusing ourselves, and pacifying our consciences from the idea that in this frail state we cannot but commit sin, we are deceiving our own souls; for “he that is born of God, sinneth not;” John iii. 9. that is, he *allows not* himself in any sin, whether of excess or defect; whether of commission or of omission. But if “our souls are really athirst for God, and we are panting after him, as the hart after the waterbrooks,” we need not fear. God will ere long “fill the hungry with good things;” “he will satisfy the longing soul, and replenish every sorrowful soul.” The very idea of hunger is a painful sensation of want; and if holiness be the object of that appetite, all *shall be well*, yea, and all *is well*: “that soul *is* blessed, and *shall be* filled.”

 CONSOLATION TO THE DISTRESSED.

Ps. xl. 17.—I am poor and needy; yet the Lord thinketh upon me. (H. H.)

THAT part of the Holy Scriptures which most fully opens the exercises of the heart is the book of Psalms. There we see a man of God unbosoming himself before his Maker, and declaring all his hopes and fears, his griefs and consolations. Sometimes he speaks in the person of the Messiah, and sometimes in his own person: sometimes his words are applicable both to the one and the other. These varieties often appear in the very same psalm: some parts of which exclusively relate to the type, or to the anti-type; and other parts are common to both. It is thus in the psalm before us. That it refers to the Messiah, there can be no doubt; because it is applied to him by God himself.* Yet there are in it some expressions, which

* Compare ver. 6—8, with Heb. x. 5—7.

should rather be explained in reference to David only. The twelfth verse in particular must be understood in this way: and the circumstance of all the following verses being repeated in another place, and formed into a distinct psalm by themselves, Ps. lxx., is a strong reason for referring them also to him principally, or perhaps to him alone. In the words of our text we notice,

I. HIS COMPLAINT—

David on some occasions was reduced to great straits and difficulties with respect to his temporal concerns; but he was also much tried in his spirit: and the complaint before us seems to have arisen from,

1. A sense of his guilt—

In verse 12, he speaks of “his iniquities having taken such hold upon him, that he was not able to look up; that they were more than the hairs of his head, so that his heart failed him.” It is very probable that he alluded in some measure to those dreadful enormities which he had committed in the matter of Uriah. But he would not consider those actions merely as insulated and detached, but rather as indications of the extreme depravity of his heart;* and in reference to *that* he might well say of himself, “I am poor and needy.” Indeed, who that knows any thing of the spirituality of God’s law, or of his own innumerable departures from it, can use any other language than that in the text? Was Adam poor when despoiled of the Divine image through the commission of one sin; and are not we, whose iniquities are more than the hairs of our head? Was he needy when banished from Paradise, and doomed to eternal death; and are not we, who from our very birth have been “treasuring up wrath against the day of wrath?” Though God has forgiven us, it does not become us to forget what we are in ourselves, but to go softly before him all our days, repenting in dust and ashes.

2. A sense of his weakness—

David had other enemies than those who opposed his regal authority. He complains in another psalm, “Iniquities prevail against me:” Ps. lxxv. 3: and he found it exceeding difficult to subdue them. On this account also he used the expressions in the text. He felt himself poor and needy in reference to every thing that he accounted good. He lamented especially his want of wisdom, and strength, and righteousness. Hence he cried, “Open thou mine eyes;” “O give me understanding in the way of godliness!” “Hold thou me up!” “hold up my goings in thy ways, that my footsteps slip not!” “Enter not into judgment with thy servant, O Lord! for in thy sight shall no man living be justified.” Similar to this is the experience of all the saints. All are insufficient of themselves for any thing that is good; and the man who was stripped, and wounded, and left half dead, Luke x. 30, was but a faint emblem of the man who, feeling in himself innumerable corruptions, is unable to mortify so much as one of them, except as he is aided from above, and strengthened by communications of the Spirit of Grace. St. Paul himself lamented his state in reference to this; yea, he even surpassed the Psalmist in his humiliating confessions and mournful complaints. Rom. vii. 24.

But in the midst of all this, we view with pleasure,

II. HIS CONSOLATION—

He considered that God’s thoughts were exercised upon him—

God is not an inattentive observer of any of his creatures: but “his eyes are more especially upon the righteous.” Ps. xxxiii. 18, 19, and xxxiv. 15. As “his eyes were upon the promised land from one end of the year even

*In this light he speaks of them in Ps. li. 5.

to the other," Job. xxxvi. 7; Deut. xi. 12, so are they upon his own people in every place and in every age. He says, "I know the thoughts that I think towards you, thoughts of good and not of evil; to give you an expected end." Jer. xxix. 11. He thinks of his people with *tender compassion*—with *anxious care*—with *joyful complacency*. How tenderly did he listen to the effusions of Ephraim's sorrow! Jer. xxxi. 18—20, and Hos. xiv. 8. With what anxiety does he sit, as a refiner, to watch the vessel which he is purifying in the furnace, lest it should by any means suffer injury by the process that was intended only for its good! Mal. iii. 3.—With what exultation too does he say, "To this man will I look, even unto him that is poor, and of a contrite spirit;" as though not all the angels in heaven could engage his attention in comparison of such a sight! David was sensible, that in the midst of all his spiritual distress he was not forgotten of his God; but that he was, notwithstanding all his unworthiness, an object of his paternal care.*

What comfort must such a consideration afford him!

Surely greater consolation could scarcely be conceived than that which would arise from this source. What must it be to have *unsearchable wisdom* contriving for his good! — — — *almighty power* ready to execute whatever Divine wisdom should judge expedient! — — — *unbounded mercy* pleading, that his sins and frailties may not provoke God to withdraw his loving-kindness from him! — — — and, lastly, *unchanging faithfulness* demanding on his behalf the accomplishment of all the promises! — — — The consideration of these things must of necessity check every desponding fear, and constrain him to exclaim, "Why art thou cast down, O my soul, and why art thou disquieted within me? Hope thou in God; for I shall yet praise him, who is the health of my countenance, and my God." Ps. xlii. 11. And every one who can realize this one consideration, has within himself an antidote for every fear, and a balm for every wound.

ADDRESS,

1. Those who know little of David's experience—

The generality of those who are called Christians would be ready to despise any one who should express himself like the inspired Psalmist. They would suppose that he was under the influence of a weak deluded mind. But let them not congratulate themselves on their fancied superiority; for they only betray their own ignorance. Rev. iii. 17, with Mic. iv. 12. Let them rather seek to know themselves; that, being made sensible of their destitute condition, they may be made rich in Christ Jesus. 1 Cor. i. 30.

2. Those whose feelings are like his—

While you are complaining of your poverty, God is saying, "But thou art rich." Rev. ii. 9. The truth is, that the more we are sensible of our guilt and helplessness, the more ready God is to help and deliver us: "The hungry he filleth with good things; but the rich he sends empty away." Indeed he paints the most destitute condition that can be imagined, on purpose that he may administer consolation to us under it. Isa. xli. 17, 18. If any then be cast down as though there were no hope, let them plead with him as David did: Ps. cxlii. 1—7; and they shall soon find by happy experience, that "God's thoughts and ways as far exceed ours; as the heavens are above the earth."† ‡

* He knew it from both his past and present experience, Ps. xxxi. 7, with verse 5.

† See Ps. lxxii. 12, 13, which may be illustrated by Jonah i. 6, 15, & ii. 1—10.

‡ If this were a subject for a *Charity Sermon*, the *Application* should be altered, and another substituted, recommending the audience to imitate God by thinking of the distresses of their fellow creatures

1 ANIEL'S CONFESSION.

Dan. ix. 3—7.—And I set my face unto the Lord God, to seek by prayer, and supplications, with fasting and sackcloth and ashes: and I prayed unto the Lord my God, and made my confession, and said, O Lord, the great and dreadful God, keeping the covenant and mercy unto them that love him, and to them that keep his commandments; we have sinned and committed iniquity, and have done wickedly, and have rebelled, even by departing from thy precepts and from thy judgments; neither have we hearkened unto thy servants the prophets, which spake in thy name to our kings, our princes, and our fathers, and to all the people of the land. O Lord righteousness belongeth unto thee, but unto us confusion of faces, as at this day. (H. H.)

FROM the earliest period, even from the time that God first had a visible church in the world, there have been particular seasons set apart for humiliation, and fasting, and prayer. In the christian church, the appointment of of forty days at this part of the year (Lent) for that purpose is of great antiquity.* The two days with which this season commenced were observed with peculiar solemnity: the one (Shrove Tuesday) was spent in recollecting and confessing† their sins; the other (Ash Wednesday) in fasting and supplication. That these institutions were carried to a very foolish excess, and that they degenerated into very absurd superstitions, under the reign of Popery, is readily acknowledged: but they were good in their origin; and our church has wisely retained such a portion of them as might tend to the real edification of her members: and if we were more observant of them than we are, we should find substantial benefit to our souls. But alas! we have run into an opposite extreme, insomuch that not only the observances are laid aside, but the very intention of them is almost forgotten: and instead of complying with the design which is intimated in the names given to the days, we render them perfectly ridiculous, by substituting a trifling change in our food for the most solemn acts of devotion before God.‡

Hoping however that on *this* day we are disposed to humble ourselves before God, we shall,

I. ILLUSTRATE THIS CONFESSION OF DANIEL—

The manner in which he made his supplications is deserving of particular attention—

He “set his face unto the Lord God:” he did not rush into the divine presence without any previous meditation, but endeavored to have his mind impressed with reverence and godly fear, that he might “not offer to his God the sacrifice of fools.”

He “sought God by prayer and supplications, with fasting, and sackcloth, and ashes.” By mortifying the body, he endeavored to aid the labors of his soul. Both the one and the other had been defiled by sin; and therefore he strove to make them partners in humiliation before God. Nor can we doubt but that the fervor of his prayers was greatly assisted by the bodily privations which God himself has so often prescribed for this very end.

Nor must we overlook *the remarkable representation which he gave of the divine character* on this occasion—

*The number of days for fasting was not always precisely the same as now: but the appointment itself may be traced almost to the times of the apostles.

†The word “*shrove*” is from the old English word “*shrive*,” which signifies *to confess*.

‡This is evident from the customs of having salt fish on Ash Wednesday, and pancakes on Shrove Tuesday. The latter in all probability arose from the people being reminded, or perhaps summoned, by a bell, to confess all their sins, *πᾶν κακόν*. From hence it was called the *παν κακόν*, or *pan-cake* bell. Alas! how widely have we deviated from the intention of those who first enjoined the observance of that day!

He mentions in very expressive terms both *the Majesty* and *the goodness* of God; the one for the abasing, the other for the encouraging, of his soul.

What words can more strongly paint *the Majesty* of God? In various other passages, God is called "the great and terrible God:" Neh. i. 5, and ix. 32, and Deut. vii. 21; and well may he be addressed in such terms; for "whoknoweth the power of his anger?" Let us only call to mind the judgments he has executed on sinners; on the rebel angels: on the antediluvian world; on Sodom and Gomorrah; on the Egyptian first-born; on Pharaoh and his hosts; yea, on the Jews in Babylon, which was the point referred to in the text; and we shall confess that "God is very greatly to be feared."

Yet he was not unmindful of the divine *goodness*. Notwithstanding God is angry with the wicked, he has "made a covenant" with his Son, wherein he engages to "shew mercy unto all that love him and keep his commandments." Now this covenant he has never violated; this mercy he has never refused to one who by faith laid hold on that covenant, and showed forth his faith by his works. And Daniel mentions this, in his address to God, as the ground on which he presumed to approach him, and ventured to hope for acceptance with him.

His confession before him is also worthy of notice, as being expressive of the deepest humility and contrition—

So deeply did he bewail his own sins and the iniquities of his people, that he strove by the most diversified expressions to make known his hatred of them: "We have sinned, and have committed iniquity, and have done wickedly, and have rebelled, even by departing from thy precepts, and from thy judgments; neither have we hearkened to thy servants the prophets, which spake in thy name."

Here he distinctly acknowledges to God *their transgression of his commandments*, and *their contempt of his reproofs*. 'These were indeed a just ground for his humiliation; since to no other nation had such a revelation of God's will been given, or such messages of mercy sent. Happy was it for him, and happy for the nation, that the reason of their chastisements was thus discovered; and that, by knowing wherein they had erred, they had learned wherein they were to amend their conduct!

There is yet one thing more on which we must make our remarks, namely, *his justification of God in all his dealings with them*—

Nothing but equity is ascribed to God; nothing but shame is taken to themselves: "O Lord! righteousness belongeth unto thee; but unto us confusion of face." He does not utter one word in extenuation of their guilt, or one complaint against the divine judgments: he declares rather, that to whatever extremities God might proceed, he could not but be righteous; and that, whatever mercies they might experience at his hands, nothing but the deepest self-abasement could ever become them. Thus he gives the most decisive evidence of true repentance, and exhibits an admirable pattern for penitents in all ages.

Having briefly illustrated this confession on Daniel, we shall,

II. FOUND UPON IT SOME SUITABLE AND APPROPRIATE OBSERVATIONS—

1. We have the same sins to confess—

Without entering into any distinctions founded on the different terms which are here accumulated, let us only take the general division before mentioned, and call to mind *our transgression of God's commandments*, and *our contempt of his reproofs*.

Which of the commandments have we not broken? We may perhaps imagine, that, though we may have violated some, we are guiltless respecting

others. But alas ! if we take our Saviour's exposition of them, and remember, that an angry word is murder, and an impure look adultery, we shall find reason to bemoan our transgression of them all.

Nor is it any small aggravation of our guilt that we have despised those warnings and invitations which he has sent us in the gospel. The ministers of Christ have testified against our ways from Sabbath to Sabbath, and from year to year : yet how few have "hearkened to their voice !" how few have turned from their evil ways ! how few have heartily embraced his salvation, or devoted themselves unfeignedly to his service ! Let us in particular enter into our own bosoms, and consider what improvement we have made of the truths delivered to us. — — — If we do this in sincerity, we shall be at no loss for matter of humiliation before God.

2. We have the same God to go unto—

We do not like to think of God's *majesty* ; but he is, as much as ever, "a great a terrible God : " the apostle justly observes, " Our God is a consuming fire." Let us not dream of a God *all* mercy : the Deity is just, as well as merciful ; and it will be found "a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God." — — —

On the other hand, the *goodness* of God is unalterable. He is still merciful to all who lay hold on his covenant ; and will assuredly fulfil to them all the promises of that covenant. Heaven and earth may fail ; but not a jot or tittle of his word shall ever fail. — — —

Let us entertain just conceptions of the divine character ; and we shall have a frame of mind suited to our condition ; we shall be under the joint influence of hope and fear ; of hope without presumption, and of fear without despondency.

3. We ought to approach him in the same manner—

We should carefully prepare our minds for communion with God. The neglect of this is the reason that we so seldom obtain real fellowship with him. We should not lay aside, as it is to be feared we do, the duty of fasting ; we should set apart seasons for more than ordinary humiliation ; and more especially improve those seasons which are set apart by public authority.

We should search out our iniquities with diligence ; and, instead of leaning to the side of self-vindication, should learn to justify God and to condemn ourselves. Nor shall we ever have our hearts right with him, till we can say, " God will be righteous, though he should cast me into hell ; and nothing but confusion of face will become me, even though I were as holy as Daniel himself."

Let us then begin the employment this day, under a full assurance, that " he who thus humbleth himself under the mighty hand of God, shall in due time be lifted up."

HUMAN WEAKNESS SUBSERVIENT TO THE POWER OF CHRIST.

2 Cor xii. 9.—Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me. (Pr.)

THE false teachers, who had perverted the minds of the Corinthians, did all in their power to traduce the character and talents of the apostle Paul, alleging that his bodily presence was weak, and his speech contemptible. The

apostle modestly admits, that he did not use "enticing words of man's wisdom," nor "come to them with excellency of speech;" and as to his talents and general appearance, he would say nothing. But if he must imitate their boasting, he would glory in the very things for which he was despised.

1. Then observe *the object* of his glorying, even "his infirmities." By these he does not mean his moral weaknesses, or sinful infirmities, but those natural defects and outward disadvantages which attended him; his affliction, reproaches, and persecutions, as it is explained in ver. 10.

2. *The reason* why he would glory in his infirmities, "that the power of Christ might rest upon him." Not that they were in themselves desirable, but they furnished an occasion for God to impart his grace, and Christ his power. Hence the apostle could say, when I am weak then am I strong; even as the consolations of the gospel are more powerfully felt in a season of adversity. When in necessities, Christ makes it up with his presence, and causes every thing to turn to our spiritual advantage.

I. NOTICE A FEW INSTANCES in which our being humbled, and made to feel our own weakness, prepares us to receive in a larger degree, the power and the grace of Christ.

It is God's usual way to empty us of ourselves, before he fills us with his own fulness; to render us weak, before we are made strong; to kill, before he makes alive.

1. A sense of our own weakness and insufficiency precedes *our first participation of divine strength and consolation*.— — — While Paul was alive without the law he felt no need of Christ, but when he died to his former hopes he began to live. The reason why many find no rest to their souls is, they are not weaned from self-righteousness, and have not been emptied from vessel to vessel. They are not helpless in themselves, and God till then withholds his help. Till then there is no coming to Christ, for those only come who are ready to perish.

2. A sense of our own weakness and insufficiency, during our progress in the divine life, *constantly precedes the communication of grace and strength*.— — — If in seeking heavenly wisdom we are wise in our own eyes, we shall not find it. If in times of temptation we are self-confident, we shall be left to fall as Peter did: but if with Jehoshaphat we feel that we have no might against this great host, and our eyes are upon the Lord, we shall be strengthened from above. If in serving our generation by the will of God we are self-sufficient, and depend upon our own zealous exertions, we shall soon be exhausted: but if we have no might of our own, we shall wait upon the Lord, and renew our strength. Isa. xl. 29—31; 2 Chron. xx. 12.

3. When ministers are most deeply sensible of their own insufficiency, *that is the most likely time for God to bless their labors*.— — — If they imagine themselves well prepared for their engagements, it is most probable they will fail in their attempts; and when they have the greatest expectation of doing good by their exertions, that is seldom the time for God to work. If ever they are strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might, it is when self is utterly renounced and annihilated; and hence the Lord often blesses his servants when their hands are weak, and their hearts are faint.

4. When the servants of God collectively are reduced to a small number, and their strength seems to be dried up, *then it is often God's time to work*.— — — When Gideon's army was strong, that was not the time to defeat the Midianites; but when reduced to three hundred, the Lord gave them the victory. When great expectations have been raised from the number and

strength of those engaged in any religious undertaking, it has often been the same; to show that it is not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit, saith the Lord of hosts. Zech. iv. 6.— — — When God would raise up the Jewish nation, he did not call a number of them at once; but he called Abraham alone, and blessed him. Isa. li. 2. When he would set up Christ's kingdom, he did not convert a great multitude, and send them forth to preach: he called twelve poor fishermen, and endowed them with power from on high. 2 Cor. iv. 7.

II. OBSERVE HOW THE INFIRMITIES AND ILLS of life are hereby converted into good to us, and become an object of glorying.

Infirmitie, reproaches, and distresses, if they do but humble us and wean us from the world, will turn to our advantage.

1. In this view primitive Christians had must reason to glory in *the sufferings* they endured for Christ's sake, for at no period was there such a display of the power and grace of Christ, or so rich an enjoyment of the divine presence and blessing.

2. In this view we also may glory in some of our *heaviest afflictions*, as they have been the means of laying us low, and bringing us near to God. Many have been purified in that furnace, and can look back to it as the best season in their whole lives.

3. We may also for the same reason rejoice in some of our most painful *losses and disappointments*. It was never better with the Jewish church, as to spiritual prosperity, than when in captivity in Babylon. In the loss of all created good, she could rejoice in the Lord as her portion, and quietly wait for his salvation.

4. In this view we may have to glory in *the prospect of death itself*. Here every human hope vanishes, and flesh and heart must fail. Man then appears in the lowest state of humiliation and nothingness, possessing no hope but in the Lord: and that is often the time when the power and grace of Christ rest most eminently upon his people. That is a time when many a weak and drooping christian has been made to triumph, and the feeblest of all have taken the prey. The last and most formidable enemy is made the messenger of greater good than all that have gone before. Most gladly therefore may we glory in our infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon us.

ENCOURAGEMENT TO PURSUE THE CHRISTIAN RACE.

Hebrews xii. 3.—For consider him that endured such contradiction of sinners against himself, lest ye be wearied and faint in your minds. (Pr.)

KNOWING the difficulties which these Hebrew converts had to encounter, and the weakness of their faith, the apostle watches over them with the utmost solicitude, endeavoring to comfort and encourage them by the example of our blessed Lord, as he had done in a former instance: ch. iii. 1.

We may here observe—1. That such things may befall us in our christian course, as to render us weary and faint in our minds. The cause itself is good, but there are many adversaries.—2. To grow weary and faint in our minds, is a very dangerous symptom. It often leads to apostacy: many a

one has first begun to tire, and then to turn back.—3. It becomes us to watch carefully against it, and to arm our minds by the example of Christ.

I. NOTICE A FEW INSTANCES IN WHICH WE ARE IN DANGER OF GROWING WEARY AND FAINT IN OUR CHRISTIAN COURSE.

1. In reference to *a close and humble walk with God*, we are prone to draw back and grow weary.— — —The happiest seasons in religion have not sufficient influence to keep us always near to God, and desirous of communion with him. After a diligent attention to the word, a more constant engagedness in holy duties, after some special instances of self-denial, a more affecting sense of our own depravity, and of the pardoning mercy of God, how prone we are to grow cold, to draw back, and to sink again into worldly-mindedness and carnality.

2. It is the same also with respect to *public duties*.— — —Those who preach the word are in great danger of sinking into discouragement, if they labor without any visible success. Isaiah complained that so few believed his report, and both Jeremiah and Elijah were on the point of giving up their work.— — —In hearing the word, if not edified and comforted, we are prone to grow weary and dull, and to think that our hearing is all in vain.— — —In prayer, if the blessings we desire appear to be withheld, we are soon discouraged, though we ought always to pray and not to faint.— — —So difficult is it to walk by faith, and live by faith: to believe the promises, and to stay ourselves upon the Lord.

3. When *persecution or reproach* overtake us in our race, we are much in danger of turning back.— — —It is easy to follow Christ when things go well, and the world is at peace with us: but if called to forego our temporal interest, to lose some of our friends, and those of our own house become our enemies, we shall be in danger of growing faint and weary in our course. When thus beset, some have been utterly discouraged, and have gone back again into the world.

4. When burdened and oppressed with *a weight of worldly cares*, and brought into unexpected difficulties, the same danger attends us.— — —In the early part of life, when free from burdens of this sort, we can go on our way rejoicing, and find the path without a thorn; but when filled with perplexing cares at a subsequent period, it is not so easy. Injuries and disappointments corrode the heart, unkindness and unfaithfulness exhaust our energies, and we move on slowly and heavily in the ways of God, faint and weary in our minds.

5. When struggling with *various temptations*, it is the same.— — —If there were no enemy to annoy, if no lion in the way, no Canaanite in the land, and no snares laid for our feet, we could proceed with alacrity and delight. But when burdened with temptations from day to day, with a load of indwelling sin, and our opposition becomes feeble and inefficient, we are in great danger of growing weary, if not of turning back.

6. *Long continued affliction*, is likewise attended with great discouragement.— — —Those who enjoy uninterrupted health do not know what others feel, who are under God's afflicting hand, and scarcely know what it is to be free from trouble. These things are apt to produce great discouragement, and even Job felt that they destroyed the hope of man: ch. xiv. 19.

7. Laboring under *a painful sense of guilt*, the mind is covered with gloom and darkness, and the heart is faint.— — —While all is peace within and without, while the conscience is kept tender, and the heart is right with God, it is easy to go forward: but when burdened with a sense of our many backslidings, and great unprofitableness, we are in danger of growing faint and weary, and of slackening in our course.

II. CONSIDER THE EXAMPLE OF CHRIST AS EXHIBITED FOR OUR ENCOURAGEMENT.

1. *What he had to endure* in his race, even “the contradiction of sinners against himself.” — — — He was not only contradicted in words, but in actions. The whole of his doctrine, work, and conduct met with continual opposition; he was tempted in all points, and tried every way. He was laughed at by Herod, tempted by the devil, reviled by the Jews, smitten by the rabble, scourged by Pilate, and put to death. — — — Whatever opposition or difficulty we may meet with, it is nothing when compared with his; he met with “such contradictions,” as no one besides ever did.

2. Consider *who it was* that endured all this, and *from whom* he endured it. — — — He was not only good and kind, as men may be; he was “holy harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners, made higher than the heaven;” the Son of God, the brightness of the Father’s glory, and the express image of his person. — — — It is no wonder if we who are sinful, and were sometime foolish, and disobedient, should meet with such treatment; but that he should be subject to obloquy and contempt, is wonderful indeed. Affecting is the thought, that one of such infinite dignity, wisdom, and purity should be contradicted, blasphemed, and persecuted; and all this by “sinners,” by sinners whom he came to save!

3. *The manner* in which he bore all this: he “endured” it. — — — He was a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief, he hid not his face from shame and spitting. He endeavoured to bring sinners to the knowledge of the truth, and amidst all their hard sayings he expostulated with the utmost forbearance. He never gave up his course of holy obedience and meek submission, till he had finished it with joy.

4. Consider *for whom he endured it.* — — — For our sakes, and for ours only; it was in love to our souls that he suffered himself to be reviled, and evilly entreated. What a motive to endure for his sake, whatever opposition we may meet with, and why we should not be weary nor faint in our minds.

Let us learn from hence the necessity of keeping Christ’s example in view, and of studying his character, in order to our perseverance in the ways of God.

Let those who contradict and blaspheme beware of the consequences, for they will soon have to give an account of all the hard speeches, which they have spoken against him. Jude. 15.

THE BELIEVER’S INWARD WITNESS.

1 John v. 10.—He that believeth in the Son of God, hath the witness in himself. (S. S.)

THE testimonies which God has given to his Son are numerous and convincing. There are three in heaven, and a similar number on earth, who bear record, that Christ is the Saviour of the world, ver, 7, 8, 11. But the believer has a distinct witness within himself; a witness, which gives a clearer insight into divine truth than any other, and fixes it with deeper conviction upon the mind. What this witness is will best appear, by considering what that is, of which it testifies.

It testifies of Christ, not only that he is a Saviour in general, but, **more** particular, that he is

I. A NEEDFUL SAVIOUR

The believer feels within himself such a load of guilt, such inability to remove it by any sufferings or obedience of his own, and such utter insufficiency for any good thing, that he is sensible he must perish, if "help be not laid for him upon one that is mighty." Ps. lxxxix. 19. As for his attempting to satisfy divine justice, or to discharge the debt he has incurred, he sees that the very thought of it is folly and madness. Nor has he any hope of ever renewing his own corrupt nature: as well might he think to change the leopard's spots, or the Ethiopian's complexion. Jer. xiii. 23. Hence, when he hears of Jesus as a Saviour, he acknowledges from his inmost soul, that such an one was needed by him, and that, without such an one, he never could have entertained a hope of mercy.

II. A SUITABLE SAVIOUR

When the believer compares his own necessities with the scripture representations of Jesus Christ, he perceives a wonderful correspondence between them, insomuch that there is nothing in Christ either superfluous or defective. Is the believer blind and ignorant? Christ is his wisdom. Is he guilty? Christ is his righteousness. Is he polluted? Christ is sanctification unto him. Is he enslaved to sin and Satan? Christ is his complete redemption. 1 Cor. i. 30, Rev. iii. 17, 18. Is Christ represented as bread to the hungry, and drink to the thirsty; as a Physician to heal, a Fountain to cleanse, a Sun to enlighten, a Shepherd to keep, &c. &c.? the believer feels within his own bosom that, which renders Christ precious to him in each particular view. He can find nothing in Christ, which his own necessities do no call for; nor any want in himself which Christ is not exactly qualified to supply.

III. A WILLING SAVIOUR

In the whole circle of the Christian's experience there is not any thing which does not throw light upon this subject. If he ask himself, What did I, to induce Jesus to take upon him my nature, and to die in my stead? What was there in me either of merit or of strength, that I should be stopped in my career of sin; that I should be pardoned, sanctified, and saved through his meritorious death, and his almighty grace? Did I choose him before he chose me? John xv. 16. Do I not daily give him abundant reason to cast me off; and is it not of his own mere mercy that he still maintains my peace with God? Surely then mercy is his delight, and the exercise of it, his chief glory.

IV. AN ALL-SUFFICIENT SAVIOUR

The believer is a wonder to himself; a bush burning, and unconsumed; a spark kept alive in the midst of the ocean: nor do the works of creation appear to him a stronger evidence of the almighty power of God, than his own preservation in the ways of godliness does, of the all-sufficiency of Christ. He cannot reflect on his errors and corruptions, his temptations and enemies, his falls and recoveries, but he is constrained to admire the efficacy of that grace, which alone has kept him, or alone restored him. As the woman who touched his garment, felt instantly within herself a proof of his ability to heal, Mark v. 28, 29. so the believer daily and hourly feels within himself a most indubitable testimony of Christ's "ability to save him to the uttermost."

OBSERVE FROM HENCE

1. How wonderfully has God, in the constitution of his gospel, consulted the benefit of the poor!

Suppose erudition or strength of intellect had been necessary to the obtaining of divine knowledge, how melancholy had been the condition of the weak and illiterate! But the gospel is like the hidden manna, which is to be known only by its taste, or the name upon the white stone, which can be read only by those who have actually received it. Rev. ii. 17. The broken and contrite heart, with an humble faith in Christ, will give an insight into the gospel, infinitely beyond all that books can impart, or the learned of this world obtain. Matt. xi. 25, 26. Let the poor then know, and duly improve, this their high privilege, their inestimable benefit.

2. How easily may we determine whether we be believers or not!

We need only consult our own consciences, and enquire whether we have an inward witness of the gospel salvation? Let not any one, however, suppose, that we are speaking of an inward persuasion of our interest in Christ. In that, we may easily deceive ourselves: but, in the former, we cannot. The inward witness gathers strength in proportion to our proficiency, and will exist, yea, will be perfected, in heaven itself.

3. What comfort we may derive even from our own corruptions!

Doubtless there is no ground of comfort in our corruptions, simply considered. Nevertheless, as reflecting light upon the gospel salvation, and especially as illustrating the power and grace of Christ, they may afford us some consolation. When they rage, then we may rejoice that there is one able to pardon our transgressions, and to heal our backslidings: and when, through grace, they are mortified, then we may rejoice that we are living witnesses of Christ's faithfulness and all-sufficiency.

THE LIBERTY WHICH CHRIST GIVES HIS PEOPLE.

John viii. 36.—If the Son therefore shall make you free, ye shall be free indeed. (S. S.)

WE are exceedingly backward to acknowledge our true state and condition—

In consequence of this we disregard the remedy provided for us—

And deprive ourselves of all the blessings of salvation—

Nevertheless our gracious Saviour endures us with much long-suffering—

And repeats to us the overtures of love and mercy—

Thus he acted towards those who denied their need of freedom—

Thus also he addresses himself to us at this time—

It will be profitable for us to consider,

I. IN WHAT RESPECTS WE ARE IN BONDAGE.

We of this nation may justly boast of our civil freedom—

But we are, like all the rest of our species, under spiritual bondage

1. Under the curse of the law.

The law of God requires perfect and perpetual obedience—

It denounces also a curse against us for every transgression—Gal. iii. 10

Its precepts have been violated by us in ten thousand instances—Rom iii. 19, 23.

We all therefore, without exception, are obnoxious to its curse—

This may well be considered as a state of wretched bondage—Gal. iii. 23

2. Under the power of sin.

Sin has infected all the members of our body, and the faculties of our soul—Ps. liii. 3.

What can be conceived to argue a state of slavery so much as this—John viii. 34.

This construction is so obvious, that no Christian can doubt respecting it—Rom. vi. 16.

The church of old confessed her iniquities to have been a sore bondage—Isai. xxvi. 13.

And St. Paul himself could find no better image whereby to express the evil and bitterness of his indwelling corruptions—Rom. vii. 14, 23.

3. Under the tyranny of Satan

The influence of Satan over us is often denied and ridiculed—

But the wickedness of men is ascribed in scripture to his agency—Eph. ii. 2.

And every impenitent sinner is expressly said to be in bondage to him—2 Tim. ii. 26.

4. Under the fear of death.

Many will shew a contempt for death on a field of battle—

But all fear it in its more gradual approaches—

Hence even the bravest are averse to meditate on death and judgment—

This is declared to be a state of wretched bondage—Heb. ii. 15.

Surely the Egyptian or Chaldean yoke was light in comparison of this—

Yet all may obtain a release from this yoke

II. HOW WE MAY BE DELIVERED FROM IT.

Vain are all attempts to liberate ourselves by our own strength

We cannot make satisfaction for one single breath of the law—

To do this, were beyond the power of the highest archangel—

Nothing but the blood of Christ can ever atone for sin—Heb. x. 4,

11, 12, 14.

We cannot by any means renew and sanctify our own hearts—

There is not in us a sufficiency even to think a good thought—2 Cor. iii. 5.

Our inclination and ability to do good can come from God alone—Phil. ii. 13.

It is not in the power of fallen man to resist the assaults of Satan—

There is provided for us armour of an heavenly temper—

And in that alone can any man hope to obtain the victory—Eph. vi. 11, 13.

We are no less unable of ourselves to disarm death of its sting—

In spite of all our efforts its terrors will appal the stoutest heart—

But “the Son” of God is able and willing to deliver us

Christ, as “the Son,” is heir and Lord of all things—Heb. i. 2.

The very intent for which he came into the world was to give us liberty—Isai. lxi. 1.

He has paid down his own life as the price of redemption—1 Peter i. 13, 19.

And therefore may claim us as his “purchased possession”—

He is also commissioned to liberate us by his power—Luke x. 20—22

All fulness resides in him for this very purpose—Ps. lxxviii. 18.

Nor will he withhold this blessing from any believing soul—John. 12.

Unspeakably blessed are they to whom this blessing is vouchsafed

III. WHAT GLORIOUS LIBERTY WE MAY OBTAIN.

The liberty which sinners enjoy is merely ideal—

But that which Christ will give, is real and substantial—*Ὀντως*.

1. He will free us from all our bondage.

The law shall never be suffered to execute its curse upon us—Rom. viii. 1.

Christ gave himself up as our surety, on purpose to redeem us from it—Gal. iii. 13.

It shall have no more power over us than a dead man over the wife that survives him—Rom. vii. 1—4.

Sin also shall be cast down from the throne which it has erected within us—

Nor, though it may renew its assaults, shall it ever regain its dominion—Rom. vi. 6, 14.

Christ will never suffer this great end of his death to be frustrated—Tit. ii. 14.

Satan himself too shall yield to the all-conquering arm of Jesus—Rom. xvi. 20.

And flee from the face of the very meanest of his saints—Contrast 2 Tim. ii. 26. with James iv. 7.

Nor shall death appear any longer formidable as an enemy—1 Cor. xv. 55.

It shall be accounted our gain, and numbered among our treasures—Phil. i. 23. 1 Cor. iii. 22.

2. He will introduce us to a state of perfect freedom

There is “a glorious liberty into which God’s children shall be brought”—

Christ will pour into their hearts a spirit of adoption—Rom. iii. 15.

And admit them to the most intimate fellowship with himself—Rev. iii. 20.

The most difficult duties also he will render pleasant to their souls—Ps. cxix. 32.

Nor will he confine his blessings to this present life—

To all eternity shall his redeemed delight themselves in him—

Their capacity of enjoyment shall be inconceivably enlarged—

And every power be freely exercised in its proper functions—

INFERENCES.

1. How glorious a Saviour is Jesus Christ!

There is no bond-slave whom he will not liberate—

He offers too this liberty “without money, and without price

He even esteems himself glorified in conferring it upon us—

Let us all admire and adore his goodness—

And by faith apply to him for this perfect freedom—

2. How just will be the condemnation of those that perish!

None ever perish but through their own fault—

Their condemnation is the consequence of their obstinate attachment to the bonds in which they are held—John iii. 19.

O that men would reflect how they will one day condemn themselves!—

Let it be remembered that such offers of mercy will never be made to us in the eternal world—

This is a day of grace; but there will come a day of vengeance—Isai. xvi. 2.

Let every one then lay the blame where it is justly due—

And follow without delay the salutary advice of David—Ps. ii. 12.

BELIEVERS ARE CHRIST'S PROPERTY.

1 Cor. iii. 23.—Ye are Christ's. (S. S.)

TRUE Christians, however poor in this world, are indeed the richest people in the universe—There is not any thing of which they have not the best use and enjoyment—All things temporal, spiritual, and eternal, belong to them—Yet they are not so rich in the property they possess, as they are in being themselves the property of another—The Apostle is enumerating in a climax the privileges of Christians—And having said that all things are theirs, he adds, as a more exalted privilege, that they are Christ's—To elucidate this truth, we shall consider.

I. WHOSE WE WERE.

The whole creation properly belongs to God—But mankind have alienated themselves from him—Nor, what ever difference may have been made between us and others by the grace of God, is there any difference between us by nature—As long as we continue unregenerate we belong

1. To ourselves

The natural man disclaims God's authority over him—And thinks himself at liberty to live to himself—This was once the state even of the apostles themselves—Tit. iii. 3. Nor is there one amongst us who was not once a rebel like unto them—Our understanding, will, and affections, we used as altogether our own—The members of our bodies too we employed wholly in our own service—Even in our religious actions we regarded self rather than God—Zech. vii. 6. With respect to all our talents of time, money, influence, &c. we said, "They are our own, who is Lord over us?"—Ps. xii. 4.

2. To the world

The world has an entire ascendancy over us by nature—We adopt its maxims, follow its fashions, and obey its dictates—The pleasures, riches, and honours of it are the idols which we worship—What more can be wanting to constitute us its vassals?—Rom. vi. 16. Our Lord himself declares, that all such persons are, not merely the friends, but the property, of the world. John. xv. 19.

3. To Satan

Satan rules in all the children of disobedience—Eph. ii. 2. He leads them captive at his will—2 Tim. ii. 26. Hence he is called the god of this world—2 Cor. iv. 4. And who amongst us has not fulfilled *his* will?—This then manifests us to have been his children—1 John iii. 8, 10. And, if we be not converted by divine grace, it may still be said to us, as it was to the Jews of old, Ye are of your father, the devil. John viii. 44.

By conversion, however, we are brought back to our rightful owner.

II. WHOSE WE ARE.

Christ is the heir and sovereign Lord of all things—Both men and devils are subject to his controul—But believers are his in a more peculiar manner—They are his people, Tit. ii. 14. his bride, Rev. xxi. 9. his very member—Eph. v. 30.

1. By donation from the Father

The Father, from eternity, chose a people for himself—Eph. i. 4. These he gave to Christ to be redeemed by him—John xvii. 6. And secured them to him by an everlasting covenant—Ps. lxxxix. 34—36. To his eternal purpose we must trace the distinction made between them and others—2 Tim. i. 9. And ascribe all our salvation to him alone—1 Cor. xv. 10.

2. By his own purchase

Though salvation is freely given to us, it was purchased for us at a most invaluable price—Christ gave his own life a ransom for us—The price he paid was no less than his own blood—1 Pet. i. 19. This is the great subject of praise in heaven—Rev. v. 9. Nor should it ever be forgotten by us on earth—

3. By the drawings of the Holy Spirit

No man, of himself, would go to Christ for salvation—All who are his, are drawn to him by the Spirit—John vi. 44. It is the Spirit who quickens and renews our souls—To him alone must we ascribe the power and the glory—Zech. iv. 6.

4. By their own voluntary surrender

All Christ's people are made willing to be his—Ps. cx. 3. They willingly renew their baptismal covenant—And give themselves up to him at his holy table—This they consider as their reasonable service—Rom. xii. 1. Yea, they rejoice in it as their highest privilege—This is the peculiar character of all true Christians—Jer. i. 5.

LEARN HENCE

1. The Christian's character

How different from what he himself once was, and the generality still are!—

2. The Christian's privilege

The most eminent Christians were once in as miserable a state as any—But now, how altered their condition!—How *happy* are they in comparison of what they were!—How infinitely preferable is Christ's service to Satan's!—And how rich the recompense they will receive from Christ in comparison of any the world could have given!—How *secure* too are they in the hands of Christ!—None shall be able to pluck them from him—John x. 28, 29. They shall assuredly be kept by the Father's power—John xvii. 11. 1 Pet. i. 5. And shall finally participate the Saviour's glory—John xvii. 24. Let them all therefore rejoice, and adore their God—Nor let them regard the frowns of an ungodly world—If Christ owns them, it signifies little who disowns them—

3. The Christian's duty

If we belong to Christ, we ought to live as his people—We should devote to ourselves, and all that we have, without reserve—This was the manifest end for which he bought us—Tit. ii. 14. Let every one then remember whose he is, and whom he is bound to serve—Nor let any one presume to alienate the Saviour's property—All that we have and are, should be employed for him—Our duty is summed up in the apostle's exhortations—1 Cor. vi. 20.

THE PRIVILEGES OF CHRIST'S FLOCK.

Luke xii. 32. Fear not, little flock ; for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom. (S. S)

AMONG the many faculties which exalt man above the brute creation, that of being able to look into futurity is by no means the least.—But while this in many instances elevates him with hope, in many other instances it depresses him with fear.—Hence he is often filled with anxiety to secure the good he hopes for, and to avert the evil which he dreads.—To discountenance this solicitude, and to teach men to live dependent upon God, is the scope of our Lord's discourse before us.—And, in the text, he fortifies his own peculiar people against fear and anxiety, by reminding them of the distinguishing favor of God towards them, and the glorious provision he has made for them. To elucidate his words we shall enquire,

I. WHY THE LORD'S PEOPLE ARE CALLED "A LITTLE FLOCK."

The metaphor of sheep is often used to characterize the followers of Christ.—Ingenuity might easily suggest a variety of particulars wherein the parallel between them may be drawn.—But, to limit our views within the strictest bounds of propriety, we observe that

They are called "*a flock*" principally from the peculiar regard shewn them by the Lord.

All who love and fear God, once "went astray like sheep that are lost." But they have been brought home by Christ, the great and good shepherd. And have been united together by him in one fold.—They are kept inclosed, as it were, and distinct from the world.—They "hear their shepherd's voice and follow him."—He "leads them into pastures" which he himself has provided for them. He administers to all their wants, "strengthening the diseased, healing the sick, and binding up the broken hearted." Ezek. xxxiv. 16. The lambs he carries in his bosom, and gently leads them that are with young." Isa. xl. 11. And, however they may feed in different pastures, he considers them all as under his peculiar care—

They are called "*a little flock*" because they are but few in number.

In every age and every place their numbers have been small.—They are "the few that find the narrow way."—When indeed they shall be all assembled at the last day they will be more than the stars of heaven or the sands upon the sea shore for multitude. Rev. vii. 9. But before that period they will receive an astonishing increase.—The whole earth shall be overspread with them ; and *that* too in successive generation for a thousand years. Rev. xx. 4. Till that day of God's power they will be a little flock when compared with the herds of the ungodly.—At present they are only "like the gleanings of the olive-tree, two or three upon the topmost branch." Isa. xvii. 6.

Interested as we must be in what relates to them, let us enquire,

II. WHAT THEY HAVE TO FEAR.

They are not exempt from the common calamities of life.—In some respects they are more exposed to them than other people.—They have reason therefore to fear

1. Wants

Though man may provide for to-morrow, he cannot secure what he has provided.—Hence all are so desirous of placing themselves as far as possible out of the reach of any disastrous contingencies.—In making such provision the true Christian labors under many disadvantages.—He cannot use

those means of acquiring wealth which the generality of the world employ without any scruple.—He cannot devote *all* his time, and *all* his attention to secular engagements.—He dares not neglect his soul, even if he could gain the whole world by it.—Moreover, he has many in the world who would be glad enough to ruin him; but few, very few, that will exert themselves much to help him forward.—On these accounts he may at times be tempted to indulge excessive care, and to harbor fears of want and embarrassment.

2. Sufferings.

The flock of Christ are not only subject to the trials incident to our present state, but are liable to many sufferings peculiar to themselves.—They are “as sheep in the midst of wolves.”—Often among themselves are found some that are “wolves in sheep’s clothing.”—Above all there is “a roaring lion ever seeking to devour them.”—Now Christians are not only weak when opposed to Satan, but also when opposed to the world.—They cannot contend with carnal weapons. 2 Cor. x. 4. “The servant of the Lord must not strive.”—The rebuke given to Peter when fighting for his Master sufficiently ties their hands from standing in their own defence. Matt. xxvi. 52. Their only weapons are faith and patience.—They are to conquer indeed, but it is by suffering even unto death. Rev. xii. 11. Well therefore may they entertain fears respecting these things.—For if they be not well armed with the mind that was in Christ, 1 Pet. iv. 1, they will faint in the day of adversity—

But the exhortation in the text leads us to enquire further.

III. WHY, NOTWITHSTANDING THEIR DANGERS, THEY SHOULD NOT FEAR.

God has “provided for them a “kingdom.”

God condescends to call himself their “Father.”—And deals with them as his children.—He has “prepared for them a kingdom” that is infinitely superior to all the kingdoms of this world.—The glory of it cannot be expressed or conceived; nor will the duration of it ever end. Heb. xii. 28. This he has given to them for their inheritance.—It is *his determination* to invest them with it, and *his delight* to preserve them for it.—His almighty power is ever exercised for this purpose. 1 Pet. i. 4, 5. Yea, his whole heart and soul are engaged in accomplishing his gracious intentions. Jer. xxxii. 41.

This is a very sufficient antidote to all their fears.

Why should they be afraid of *want*, who have God for their Father, and a kingdom for their inheritance?—Can it be supposed that he who provides for the evil and unthankful, and sustains the ravens that call upon him, will neglect his own children?—Will he, who of *his good pleasure* bestowed upon them all the glory of heaven, refuse them what is necessary for their present sustenance?—Why too should they be afraid of *sufferings*, since “not a hair of their head can perish,” “nor can even a sparrow fall to the ground, without the permission of their Father?”—If he see fit to let loose the enemy for the trial of their faith, will he not support their courage, and make them “more than conquerors?”—Besides, will not their “light and momentary afflictions work out for them a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory?” “And will not a kingdom abundantly compensate all their trials?”—Surely then they should dispel all fears; and commit themselves into the hands of a faithful God. Pet. iv. 19.

ADDRESS,

1. The flock of Christ.

God would have you without carefulness. 1 Cor. viii. 32. He bids you cast all your care on him who careth for you. 1 Pet. v. 7. And shall God

be so concerned about relieving your fears, and you not be concerned to honor him?—O chide your unbelieving thoughts, and say, Why art thou disquieted, O my soul?—Jehovah is my shepherd, I shall not want; Jehovah is my Father, I will not fear. Ps. xxiii. 1, 4. Surely if you reflect on the promises he has made to you, it will be impossible for you ever to be cast down again.—“Ye, my flock,” says he, “the flock of my pasture, are men; but I am your God, saith the Lord God.” Ezek. xxxiv. 31. “When you pass through the waters, I will be with you, and through the fire, you shall not be burnt.” Isa. xliii. 2. See also John x. 27, 28. Consider, “If God be for you, who can be against you?”—O be careful for nothing; but in every thing by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known unto God; and the peace of God which passeth all understanding shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus, Phil. iv. 6, 7.

2. The herds of this world.

Shall we address you in the language of the text, Fear not? Alas! not only the scriptures, but also your own consciences would condemn us.—You may possibly have no particular cause to dread either wants or sufferings in this world, (though you cannot tell what may befall you before you die) but may you not have to “dwell with everlasting burnings,” and want even “a drop of water to cool your tongue” in that world to which you are hastening?—Know assuredly, that your numbers will not screen you from the vengeance of an angry God.—If you be not of those who have put themselves under the care of the good shepherd, you will be considered as goats, and be forever separated from the flock of Christ.—“He will set the sheep on his right hand, and the goats on his left.”—You will then find to your cost, that not God, but Satan was your Father; and that with Satan must be your portion. John viii. 42, 44. It is not without much regret that God *now* gives you up to that misery. Hos. xi. 8. But in the last day he will find as much satisfaction, and be as much glorified, in your destruction, as in the salvation of his elect.—He now complains, “Thou hast wearied me with thine iniquities;” but then he will say, “Ah! I will ease me of mine adversaries.” Isa. i. 24. Seek then to become the sheep of Christ—Beg him to bring you home to his fold, and to feed you in his pleasant pastures.—Then shall we all become one fold under one shepherd, and feed beside the living fountains of water to all eternity.

A SENSE OF WEAKNESS CONDUCTIVE TO STRENGTH.

2 Cor. xii. 10. When I am weak, then am I strong.—(S. S.)

THERE are many things in scripture which appear inconsistent and contrary to truth. Christ is represented as God, and yet a man; as the Lord of David, and yet his son; as a lion, and yet a lamb. And, as his persons is thus variously described, so is his work. He is said to heal us by his own stripes, and to give us life by his death. But, however strange such expressions may seem, they contain many important truths. In the same manner the apostle's words, which we have now read, may be thought to imply a contradiction: but they accord with the experience of all God's people, and justly deserve the most attentive consideration.

In discoursing on this paradoxical assertion, we shall *illustrate, confirm, and improve* it.

I. ILLUSTRATE IT.

A part of David's history will help to elucidate the words before us

When the champion of the Philistines defied, and terrified, the whole army of Israel, David, "a stripling," without armor, defensive or offensive, (except a sling and a stone,) went forth against him; and, though unused to war himself, entered into combat with that experienced and mighty warrior. But the weaker he was in himself, the more confident was he in his God: and instead of being intimidated by the threatening aspect, and, boasting determinations of his adversary, he was assured of victory, as if he had seen his enemy already under his feet. 1 Sam. xvii. 45—47.

But the context will give the best clue to the apostle's meaning.

St. Paul laboured under a heavy trial, which he calls a thorn in his flesh, ver. 7, 8. Apprehensive that this would counteract his usefulness in the world, he cried most earnestly to the Lord Jesus Christ to remove it from him. But his Lord, not judging it expedient to grant him his request, promised him (what was incomparably better) more abundant communications of grace, whereby he should obtain in a more advantageous manner the desire of his soul. Observe the effect—Paul remained as weak as ever; but being persuaded that Christ's power should be the more magnified through his weakness, he was satisfied; yea, rather, he made *that* a matter of joy and triumph, which had just before been a source of the greatest trouble. He was well assured that, however unable he was in himself either to bear his trials, or to fulfil his duties, he could not but succeed, when his almighty friend was pledged to succour and support him.

The apostle's assertion being equally applicable to all believers, we shall

II. CONFIRM IT.

A sense of weakness necessarily tends to make us strong, inasmuch as it makes us

1. Watchful against temptations,

If we conceive ourselves to be strong, we shall be fearless of temptation; and by exposing ourselves to it, shall be in greater danger of falling: whereas, if we feel our utter weakness, we shall not only pray, "Lead us not into temptation," but shall carefully shun the places, the books, the company, that may ensnare us. Like Joseph, we shall not parley with the tempter, but flee in haste: or, if we cannot flee, we shall oppose our enemy at first; and thus vanquish that, which, if it had time to gather strength, would soon vanquish us.

2. Importunate in prayer,

It is the sick alone who calls for a physician; they who are strong in their own conceit, will never pray in earnest; but he who feels his need of divine assistance will seek it at a throne of grace. Now if we do not pray for God's aid, we cannot receive it; and therefore in the hour of trial shall surely fail. But, if we pray with importunity and faith, we shall obtain the things we ask for; and consequently shall be upheld, while others fall. It was by this means that Paul obtained strength; "he prayed to the Lord *thrice*:" the answer vouchsafed to his petition dissipated all his fears, and strengthened him with might in his inner man: and similar means will always be attended with similar success.

3. Dependent on Christ,

In proportion as we fancy ourselves strong, we must of necessity confide in our own strength; the consequence of which may be sufficiently seen in the

repeated falls of Peter. But, if we are conscious that we are wholly without strength, and can do nothing of ourselves, we shall be more simple and uniform in our dependence on Christ. Now Christ will never suffer those, who trust in him to be confounded. He would consider it as an impeachment of his own veracity, if he did not give them "grace sufficient for them:" consequently, we never are so truly strong, as when we are deeply convinced of our own utter impotence.

This truth enters deeply into the experience of all the Lord's people: we shall therefore endeavour to,

III. IMPROVE IT.

Among the various lessons which it teaches us, let us especially learn two,

1. Not to be too much elated on account of any manifestations of the divine favour.

Paul was caught up into the third heavens; but soon afterwards we behold him crying, with much anguish of mind, under a severe affliction. Thus it may soon be with us. Indeed the seasons most distinguished by God's favour to us, are often most distinguished also by Satan's malice. It was immediately after they had received peculiar tokens of God's love, that he assaulted Paul, ver. 4. and Peter, Matt. xvi. 17, 23. and Christ himself. Matt. iii. 17. and iv. 1. Let us then, when most highly favoured, "rejoice with trembling," Ps. ii. 11. and not while harnessed, boast as if we had put off our armour. 1 Kings xx. 11.

2. Not to be too much dejected on account of our manifold infirmities.

Jacob was lamed by God himself, that he might know he had not prevailed by his own strength. Gen. xxxii. 25. And Paul had a thorn in the flesh given him, "lest he should be exalted above measure." Now our infirmities are very painful: but they are necessary, in order to keep alive in our minds a remembrance of our own weakness and vileness; and if we do but carry them to God in fervent prayer, he will glorify himself by means of them, and "perfect his strength in our weakness." "Let the weak then say, I am strong; Joel iii. 10. let them "be strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might; Eph. vi. 10. and, doubtless, they shall receive that effectual succour, which believers, in all ages, have experienced, Heb. xi. 34. and shall invariably find their "strength according to their day" of trial. Deut. xxxiii. 25.

BENEFITS ARISING FROM GOD'S RETURN TO THE SOUL.

Isai. xxx. 26.—Moreover the light of the moon shall be as the light of the sun, and the light of the sun shall be sevenfold, as the light of seven days, in the day that the Lord bindeth up the breach of his people, and healeth the stroke of their wound. (S. S.)

THE dispensations of providence, if rightly improved, are calculated to promote our spiritual welfare.—The Jews derived many instructive lessons from the dealings of God with them in Egypt and the wilderness.—But God here promises that more abundant knowledge and joy by means of their deliverance from the Assyrian host.* The grandeur, however, of the words

* That this is the literal import of the passage appears from ver. 31. compared with ver 25, 26.

Before us evidently shews, that the prophet had respect to blessings, which no temporal deliverance was able to convey.—We shall therefore endeavour to point out some other seasons when this promise receives its fuller accomplishment.

1. AT THE FIRST RECONCILIATION OF THE SOUL TO GOD.

The convictions of an awakened conscience are as deep wounds to the soul.

Sin, though it be honey in the mouth, becomes gall in the stomach—Peter, Judas, and David in particular, shew what “wounds” it will make in the soul—Ps. xxxii. 1—6. Nor can any one view it aright, without, having his heart broken with a sense of its malignity—

But reconciliation with God heals these wounds.

The blood of Christ is that “balm of Gilead,” which never was applied in vain—Jer. viii. 22. It operates as the sight of the brazen serpent on the dying Israelites, to restore to life and vigour those, whose state seems altogether desperate—John iii. 14, 15. David, after the foulest transgressions declared his persuasion of its efficacy to cleanse even him—Ps. li. 7, 8. And all who are reconciled to God through Christ, experience its full effects—Luke iv. 18. 1 Pet. i. 8.

And this is a season, wherein the knowledge and joy of the soul are much enlarged.

Till this great event is accomplished, the views of the soul are very contracted; nor is it acquainted with any joy but what is carnal.—But no sooner has this taken place, than the light of the knowledge of the glory of God shines into the heart, and all his perfections are admired and adored.—Now also the excellency of the gospel salvation is discovered; and the reasonableness of a life devoted to God is deeply felt.—Now is a new and inexhaustible source of happiness opened to the soul; and its peace and joy flow down like a river.—And all the pleasures that it ever enjoyed in the ways of sin, are no more in comparison of its present consolations, than the faint “light of the moon” to the invigorating rays of the meridian “sun”—

But this promise has a further accomplishment.

II. AT ANY RETURN OF GOD TO THE SOUL AFTER A SEASON OF DARKNESS AND DESERTION.

God finds it necessary sometimes to hide his face from his people, and thus to wound their souls afresh.

How the loss of God’s presence afflicts a pious soul, may be seen in the lamentations and complaints, which the most eminent saints have uttered on such occasions. Job tells us, that God’s arrows stuck fast in him, and that the poison of them drank up his spirit. Job vi. 4. And David even “roared for the disquietness of his heart.” Nor are there wanting at this day many, whose experience accords with the description which that eminent saint has given of his—Ps. xlii. 3, 4, 6, 7, 9.

But the return of God binds up this breach.

The deliverance from such a state is compared by our Lord to the joy that succeeds the pangs of childbirth—1 John xvi. 21. Nor can its effects upon the soul be more fitly represented than in the language of the Jews on their return from Babylon—Ps. cxxvi. 1—3.

And this also is another season of peculiar instruction and comfort.

By this the soul obtains much deeper discoveries of its own corruptions; Job xlii. 5, 6. and more encouraging views of God’s power and faithfulness—Isai. xxv. 1, 4. The depths of Satan’s device also are more clearly

discerned.—And, if its joys are less ecstatic than before, they are more pure and refined—

The full accomplishment of the text will take place,

III. AT THE HOUR OF DISSOLUTION.

God never entirely withholds his chastening rod in this world.

The whole of this life is a state of discipline — — —

But at death there is an end of every thing that is penal, or painful.

Whatever wounds may have pained us here, death will heal them all
Rev. xxi. 4. — — —

Then will this promise be fulfilled in its utmost extent.

What amazing discoveries will be made to the soul on its first dismissal from the body! And with what inconceivable raptures will it be transported, as soon as ever it shall enter the gates of heaven! Whatever it may have heard of the blessedness of the saints, it will surely say, that not a thousandth part had been declared to it. Then shall those descriptions given by the prophets, all be realized—Isai. lx. 19. 20. Rev. xxi 23. and xxii. 5. As for the joys it experienced below, they shall appear as nothing in comparison of those it will then possess.—What they tasted here, was through the medium of ordinances, and mixed with frequent sorrows, and, at best, of short duration.—But what they possess in heaven, will be immediate, unmixed, and everlasting—

INFER,

1. They, who have never yet been wounded in their souls on account of sin, are yet strangers to all spiritual light and happiness.

They may be conversant with all the depths of philosophy, and all the pleasures of sense.—But the unhumbed and unbelieving soul is yet blinded by Satan, nor has even the glimmering light of the moon with respect to spiritual concerns—2 Cor. iv. 4. and 1 Cor. ii. 14. Let such then beg of God to open the eyes of their understanding; and let them seek those convictions of sin, whereby they shall be disposed to admit, and to love, the truth—

2. They who feel a wounded spirit, should labour to improve their convictions to the uttermost.

Too many endeavour to silence the accusations of conscience, and to drown its voice in business or pleasure.—But if we knew how ready God is to heal the broken spirit, and what unspeakable benefits would ultimately flow from our convictions, surely we should cherish them with care, and improve them with diligence.—Let us then not “heal our wounds slightly,” but go to the blood of Jesus?—Then, “though weeping may endure for a night, joy shall come to us in the morning,” even that “joy which is unspeakable and full of glory.”

ALL THINGS WORK FOR GOOD TO GOD'S PEOPLE.

Rom. viii. 28.—We know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose. (S. S.)

TRUE believers have the greatest encouragement to draw nigh to God—

They have supernatural assistance when pouring out their hearts before him—

And are assured by God himself that their prayers shall be heard—

Yea, sometimes, like the Israelites in Egypt, the more they renew their requests, the more they find their burdens increased—Exod. v. 6—8.

Hence, like them, they are also sometimes ready to murmur and despond—lb. ver. 20, 21.

But, by grace they are enabled to wait patiently the Lord's leisure—

And invariably, in the issue, the clouds which they so much dreaded, burst in blessings on their heads—

This St. Paul declares to be the experience of all true believers—

His words lead us to shew.

I. THE CHARACTER OF TRUE CHRISTIANS.

Christians are sometimes described in the scriptures by their regard for God, and sometimes by God's regard for them—

The text leads us to speak of them in both points of view,

1. Their regard to God.

The "loving of God" is a character peculiar to true Christians—

Others are represented rather as "haters of God" and enemies to him in their minds—Rom. i. 30. Col. i. 21.

But they, who are partakers of his grace, have their natural enmity removed—

They behold his excellency, and are sensible of their obligations to him—

Hence they love him, and strive to love him with their whole hearts—

2. God's regard for them.

Their regard for him sprang not from any good dispositions in themselves—

It resulted purely from the manifestations of God's love to them—

He formed "purposes" of love to them from all eternity—Jer. xxxi. 3.

In due time he "called" them by his grace, and made them his people—

And this distinguishing favour is the true source of their love to him—

To this effect both our Lord and his beloved apostle testify—John xv. 16.

1 John iv. 19.

To the eternal purposes of God therefore, and not to the inclinations of our carnal minds, all the good that is in us, be traced—

To persons of this description the apostle announces,

II. THEIR PRIVILEGE.

It is under sufferings that the superiority of the Christian's state is to be seen to the greatest advantage—

Of them the apostle speaks; and declares that, of whatever kind they be, they shall work for the good of them that love God.

The Christian may be called to bear the heaviest *afflictions*—

But they shall bring him to consideration, stir him up to prayer, wean him from the world, and lead him to seek his rest above— — —

He may be assaulted also with the most distressing *temptations*—

But these will shew him the evil of his heart, and the faithfulness of his God—

They will also teach him to sympathize with his tempted brethren—

Even *death* itself will be among the number of the things that shall prove beneficial to him—

This is the most formidable enemy to fallen man—

It cuts him off from all means and opportunities of salvation, and seals him up under endless and irremediable misery—

But to a true Christian it is a most invaluable treasure—1 Cor. iii. 22.

It puts a period to all his sorrows and temptations, and introduces him to the immediate, everlasting enjoyment of his God—

Nor need we doubt of this blessed truth.

The apostle speaks of it not as a matter of conjecture, but of certainty—

As he knew it, so may “we know” it, from the declarations and promises of God—Ps. xxv. 10.

Both David and Paul have attested it also from their own experience—Ps. cxix. 71. Phil. i. 19.

Nor is there any Christian in whom it has not been realized—

It is not however *singly* or *separately* that all things work for good, but as taken “*together*” in a collective view—

Separately considered, many things may have wrought for evil, by producing sinful tempers or actions—

But when viewed as connected with *all* their effects and consequences, the most untoward circumstances will be found to have wrought for good—

This subject naturally suggests,

1. A rule whereby to judge of our election of God—

Our election of God can be known only by its effects, 1 Thes. i. 4, 5.

To ascertain it, we must enquire whether we have been *called* by his grace.

And whether, in consequence of that call, we *love God* supremely?—

If we experience these effects, we may safely conclude, that God has entertained eternal purposes of love towards us.—

But if we trace not these effects, our pretensions to an interest in his electing love is a fatal delusion.—

Let them, in whom these evidences are found, rejoice; but rejoice with trembling.—

2. A ground of consolation for the afflicted.

Afflictions are not at the present joyous, but grievous—

And under them we are ready to say, “All these things are against me”—

But the scripture tells us, “the trial of our faith is precious”—1 Pet. 1. 7

Let the afflicted then consider what “good” may be accruing to them—

Their troubles may be working so as to discover, prevent, punish, or destroy *sin*— — —

Or they may be working to impart, exercise, strengthen, or perfect *grace*— — —

What reason, in either case, have the afflicted to take comfort!—

We think little of inconveniencies if they do but promote our *temporal* interest—

Should we then be averse to any trials that may tend to our *spiritual* advantage?—

Let us wait to see “the end of the Lord,” and be solicitous rather about our future benefit, than our present ease—

3. A strong incentive to love and serve God.

Things are never represented as working for the good of the wicked—

On the contrary, their temporal blessings are often cursed to them—

Yea, even spiritual blessings only aggravate their guilt and condemnation—2 Cor. ii. 16.

Christ himself proves, not a Saviour, but a stumbling-block to them—

1 Pet. ii. 7, 8.

But for God's people, all things, sin excepted, work for good—

Should they not then love him for such distinguished mercy?—

Can they ever do enough for him, who so marvellously overrules all events for them?

A CONSCIENCE VOID OF OFFENCE.

Acts x. iv. 16.—And herein do I exercise myself, to have always a conscience void of offence, towards God and towards men. (Sk.)

THE Jews charged the apostle Paul with high crimes, and employed Tertullus, an orator, to bring accusations against him before Felix, the governor. Tertullus flattered Felix, and abused Paul; but produced no proof of guilt in the holy apostle. The answer of Paul was manly, correct, and convincing. He had nothing to fear. His conduct had been pious and circumspect; for he had exercised himself “to have always a conscience void of offence both towards God and men.”—But what is implied in a conscience void of offence?—And how should we exercise ourselves to have such a conscience;

1. WHAT IS IMPLIED IN A CONSCIENCE VOID OF OFFENCE?

1. *Conscience is the secret testimony of the soul, whereby it approves things that are good, and condemns those that are evil.* A good conscience is purified by the blood of Christ, 1 Tim. i. 5; Heb. ix. 14. An evil conscience is loaded with guilt, Heb. x. 22. And a hardened conscience does not feel the evil of sin, 1 Tim. iv. 2. Conscience has a rule of action; it compares action with that rule, and draws inferences from the comparison.

2. *To have a conscience void of offence, three things are necessary:—*First, a good rule of conduct; secondly, an impartial comparison of our conduct with that rule; and thirdly, a conviction that there has been a conformity of conduct to our rule. In that case, conscience does not charge us with wilful crimes; but assures us of innocence and rectitude. Advocates for sin, whether professors or profane, will not allow that any man has a conscience void of offence, but surely the grace of God is sufficient to keep us from all sin, 1 Cor. xv. 34.

3. *That man who has a conscience void of offence towards God, is inwardly pious, and practises all the duties of piety.* He believes in God, Heb. xi. 6; he fears God, Ps. cxxxviii. 1; he loves God, Matt. xxii. 37, 38; he prays to God, Phil. iv. 6; he trusts in God, Isa. xxvi. 4; he praises God, Isa. xii. 1; and he worships God in spirit and in truth, John iv. 24. These are the principal duties of piety; and when we engage in them with true sincerity, we have a conscience void of offence towards God.

4. *He who has a conscience void of offence towards men, carefully follows two rules:—*First, he injures no man, either in his person, in his property, or in his character; and, secondly, he does all the good which is in his power to every man with whom he is connected, both in word and deed. He loves all men, he prays for all, and he is ready to forgive injuries and insults. While he walks humbly with his God, he is careful to do justly to men, and is ever ready to exercise mercy, Mic. vi. 8.

II. HOW SHOULD WE EXERCISE OURSELVES TO HAVE A CONSCIENCE VOID OF OFFENCE?

1. Let us use those means by which we may obtain an enlightened conscience, that we may understand our duty both to God and men. To this end carefully examine the word of God, which is the only safe guide of human conduct. Without this blessed book, we fall into error and sin; we dishonor God and injure men: and vainly imagine that we are doing what is fit and right. Thus Saul thought it right to do many things against the church: but he did those things in ignorance and unbelief, Acts xxvi. 9; 1 Tim. i. 13.

2. It should be an invariable rule with us, *to do nothing at any time, or*

under any circumstances, contrary to the dictates of conscience. When we act contrary to our views of things, we are self-condemned. If the conscience be not sufficiently enlightened, we should not venture to act against its warnings. Every one should be persuaded in his own mind that what he does is right; for if this be not the case, he cannot be guiltless before the Judge of all the earth. Whatsoever men do, without a conviction of its lawfulness, is sin to them; for whatsoever is not of faith is of sin, Romans xiv. 22, 23.

3. In this holy exercise we should *abstain from the appearance of evil*; for if we yield to any thing which our own mind condemns, or to any thing which appears evil in the eyes of wise and good men, we shall soon fall into great and gross sins, 1 Thess. v. 22. For this reason we should steadily follow what we deem to be right, even in *little things*; and scrupulously avoid evil of every kind and degree. If this rule be constantly followed, we shall seldom deviate from the path of duty.

4. That we may keep a conscience void of offence, let us *be careful not to enter into temptation*. We may be tempted to evil without our own consent, and without sin; but if we enter into it, we become guilty before God. We should resist the first attack of an enemy. Temptation when first presented to the mind is generally weak, and we are strong; but its strength increases and ours diminishes, when we enter into it. For this reason we should not enter into it at all, lest we be overcome in an evil hour, Matt. xxvi. 41.

5. As a farther help in this important work, *let us be vigilant*. We are surrounded by enemies, who are ready to seize every favorable moment to draw us from our duty. Let us look out for them, that we may not be taken by surprise. Watch against all evil, whether inward or outward; watch for opportunities of doing good; and watch for the coming of Jesus to judge the world. The admonition of our Lord will never be out of season, "What I say unto you, I say unto all, Watch," Mark xiv. 37.

6. To watchfulness let us add *prayer*. Let us pray for wisdom to conduct us safely through difficult circumstances, James i. 5. Let us pray for courage and strength, that we may be able to overcome all evil; and for that comfort and consolation which may be necessary for us in our trials and temptations. He who is always in the spirit of prayer, cannot live in any known sin; and for this reason, let us "pray without ceasing," 1 Thess. v. 17.

7. It is essentially necessary, in this blessed exercise, to *avoid secret sins*. These are fully known to God, Ps. xc. 8. He will bring them into judgment, Eccles. xii. 14. Secret sins lead to open wickedness; and he who sins in the dark will soon transgress in open day. No man who lives in secret sin, whatever his pretensions are, has a conscience void of offence. And his sin, though artfully concealed from men, will be sure to find him out, Num. xxxii. 23.

8. While we *set God before us*, in his justice and purity, and in his awful majesty and glory, we shall be careful to keep a conscience void of offence. This is our duty, and our privilege, Gen. xvii. 1; Ps. xvi. 8. His eyes are constantly upon us, and he hates all evil. Our love to him produces a hatred of evil; and if our love be without dissimulation, we shall abhor and detest it, Ps. cxvii. 10; Rom. xii. 9.

9. Let us *be conversant with death and judgment*. These are solemn subjects; they should occupy our thoughts in the morning when we awake; throughout the day, when we are engaged in business; and in the evening,

when we retire to rest. While this is the case we shall be careful neither to offend God nor to injure man.

10. And lastly, *we should exercise ourselves daily in meditations on the happiness of heaven, and the torments of hell.* There is a heaven of light and glory for good men; and there is a hell of darkness and shame for the wicked, Rev. xxi 23; Ps. ix. 17. He who has a good conscience, is an heir of immortal blessedness; but he whose conscience is loaded with guilt, is an heir of death and hell, Rom. vi. 23. Serious reflections on these subjects will keep us from sin.

INFERENCES.

1. While we keep a conscience void of offence, *we enjoy the approbation of God*, and are happy in his love, Ps. xi. 7.

2. When this is the case, *our minds are at rest*, and we enjoy that peace which passeth all understanding, Phil. iv. 7.

3. This takes away the *fear of man*, which brings a snare to the soul, and enables us to look every one in the face without a blush of guilt.

4. And while the conscience is void of offence *we are holy, happy and useful*, and all things go well with us both for time and eternity, Isa. iii. 10. May we all enjoy this invaluable blessing, through Jesus Christ our Lord, Amen.

THE EXCELLENCY OF UNION.

Psalm cxxxiii. 1.—Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity. (Sk.)

AMONGST the numerous excellencies which are connected with true religion, the delightful union of which it is productive holds a very distinguished place. Through the influence of religion, men whose condition in life, disposition of mind, mode of education, and regular habitudes, have been not only widely different, but also directly opposed to each other; have become so closely united, that even Heathenism, with all its inveterate opposition to revealed truth, has been constrained to attest, “See how these christians love!” And this interesting union has not been confined to the christian dispensation, but was manifestly a striking feature in the piety of rural and patriarchal times; and it also constituted a distinguished excellency in the Jewish church. David bears testimony to its existence in his day, exclaiming in the spirit of admiration, “Behold how good and how pleasant it is,” &c. It is very probable that this psalm was composed on the termination of that civil war, which had so long prevailed between the two houses of Saul and David: yet this language may very properly be applied, in reference to the harmony of religious societies or christian churches. In thus using this portion of Scripture we shall,

I. DEFINE THE NATURE OF SCRIPTURAL UNION.

II. ASSERT ITS TRANSCENDENT EXCELLENCE. And,

III. SPECIFY THE MEANS OF ITS PROMOTION.

I. DEFINE THE NATURE OF SCRIPTURAL UNION. This union may be considered as including—*Sentiment—Affection—Design—and Operation.*

1. *A oneness of sentiment.* Whilst the different denominations of christians, in consequence of their early associations and impressions having been widely different, entertain notions contrary to each other on various subjects of minor importance, yet on the grand essential truths of christianity they are one. The fall, and consequent depravity of man; the divinity and atonement of Christ, the necessity and reality of the operations of the Holy Ghost, and justification by faith alone, are doctrines which form a kind of central point, at which the christian tribes meet, and sing,

“Let names, and sects, and parties fall
And Jesus Christ be all in all.”

This is manifest by their writings, their public ministrations, and their union of defence when these truths are assailed.

2. *A union in point of affection.* All those who are the “children of God by faith,” maintaining the same common principles, influenced by the same powerful motives, participating the same spiritual enjoyments, and bearing the same divine image, are the subjects of a mutual and tender affection, which expresses itself by various acts of kindness; such as administering to each other’s necessities, steadily watching over each other’s interests, studiously labouring to promote each other’s happiness, and patiently bearing with each other’s infirmities, Rom. xii. 5—10; Heb. vi. 10; 1 Pet. i. 22; Gal. vi. 2; Heb. x. 32—34; 1 John iii. 16, 17.

3. *A sameness of principle, and a union of heart, are very naturally productive of a similarity of design.* And Christians generally, and with steady uniformity, purpose to secure their own final salvation—to endeavour instrumentally, to effect the salvation of their friends and neighbours—to extend the kingdom of the Redeemer in the earth, having for their ultimate object the glory of God, Acts xxiv. 16; Rom. x. 1, xiv. 7, 8; 1 Cor. x. 31.

4. *Operation.* In this distinguished age of light and glory, the followers of Christ generally agree to merge their little differences on minor points of faith, in a unity of effort, to accomplish the grand object of their mutual purpose. If we turn our attention to school institutions, to Bible societies, and to Missionary establishments, we shall delightfully behold christians of all denominations rallying round the common standard, and marching on to certain conquest.

II. **ASSERT ITS TRANSCENDENT EXCELLENCE.** There are many things which are very good, but not pleasant; while other things, which, to the vitiated inclinations of a depraved heart, appear delightful, are in reality injurious and destructive; but scriptural union is both “good and pleasant.” This will appear, if we consider,

1. *Its moral fitness.* The union of the christian church is in exact agreement with the nature and perfections of God, John iii. 16; 1 John iv 8—10. Correspondent with the great designs of mercy in the gospel of Christ, Eph. ii. 13; Col. i. 20—22. And strictly congruent with the harmony of the heavenly world, Rev. vii. 9—17.

2. *Its pleasing appearance.* Whilst discord and hostility offend the eye, and pain the heart of the thoughtful observer, union, of whatever description, tends to excite the most pleasurable sensations in the breast; but this is more especially the case when tranquillity pervades a religious society. When materials originally so discordant are brought into a state of delightful harmony, the scene is highly pleasing, and produces admiration, excites lively joy, and elicits sentiments of gratitude. The Psalmist felt the influ-

ence of such a scene, and made use of the most odoriferous compound, as a figure by which to describe the effect which was produced upon his mind.

3. *Its beneficial influence.* Union ever tends to augment the happiness of its possessor,—to recommend divine truth to mankind,—to extend the kingdom of Christ in the earth,—and to give strength and stability to the christian course, Rom. xvi. 16, 19 ; 2 Cor. xiii. 11.

III. SPECIFY THE MEANS OF ITS PROMOTION. In promoting christian union there are,

1. *Some things to be avoided.* If we would have peace in our own bosoms, and live in peace with our christian brethren, we must steadily avoid a spirit of evil surmising; and guard against hard and uncharitable thoughts, in reference to our fellow professors, resolutely resisting every inclination to evil speaking and detraction. If we indulge thoughts which are inconsistent with that “charity” which “thinketh no evil,” we shall involve ourselves in condemnation, and be in the way of speaking those words, and performing those actions, which will prove destructive to the union and happiness of the church, Eph. i. 1, 2, iv, 26, 27, 31 ; James iii. 13—18, iv, 11. In order to preserve christian harmony.

2. *There are some things to be performed.* As we are regularly dependant upon God for strength and support, it is of the utmost importance that we maintain constant communion with him by fervent prayer; also that we uniformly regulate our conduct and conversation by that infallible directory which infinite wisdom has furnished, making the sacred Scripture our constant guide at all times; steadily and conscientiously using every means which has a tendency to unite us more closely to our christian brethren. Finally, above all, let us labour to “grow in grace, and in the knowledge and love of God,” so shall we be preserved from every evil, and regularly demonstrate “how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity.” This subject,

1. Excites to close and serious self-examination.
2. Teaches us that discord in religious societies impedes the progress of the gospel.
3. Describes a line of conduct for us in the future part of life.

EARLY PIETY EXEMPLIFIED IN JOSIAH.

2 Chronicles xxxiv. 3.—While he was yet young, he began to seek after the God of David his father. (Sk.)

It was the observation of an inspired apostle, that “not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called.” God’s people have generally been an afflicted and a poor people “the poor have the gospel preached to them,” and “God hath chosen the poor in this world, to be rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom which he hath promised unto them that love him.” But the individual exhibited to our view in the text, was differently circumstanced. He was a king, and sat upon a throne, and reigned over a great people; and though many acts of his life are inimitable by us, yet in the view in which the text represents him, he is eminently worthy the attention of the junior part of my congregation. We will therefore notice three things,

I. THE OBJECT AFTER WHOM JOSIAH SOUGHT ;—“The God of David his father.”

II. THE MANNER HOW HE SOUGHT AFTER THAT OBJECT ; which will be seen by referring to this chapter.

III. THE PERIOD OF LIFE WHEN HE DID IT ;—“While he was yet young,” &c.

I. THE OBJECT AFTER WHOM JOSIAH SOUGHT. Josiah sought after the God of David his father. Josiah lived four hundred years subsequently to David, but being David's remote descendant he is considered as his son. Also, when one person imitates another, by a familiar mode of speech, he is represented as his son. Abraham was the father of the faithful. “Ye are of your father the devil, because his works ye do.” Josiah imitated David, see ver. 2. God was David's God

1. *God was David's teacher.* David was a man of extensive information, his knowledge was various; he knew much of God and his works; much of men and things; but he was indebted to God for his instruction. “The Lord is my delight,” &c. Ps. xxvii. 1. “Thou through thy commandments hast made me wiser than mine enemies.” “I will thank thee, O Lord, who hast given me counsel.” David's soul was dark and ignorant by nature, but God instructed and taught him great things out of his law.

2. *God was David's comfort.* He was involved at times in great trouble; he had tasted the wormwood and the gall; the waves and billows had gone over him; he had experienced personal, family, and national trouble. But he had applied unto God, and was enabled to say, “In the multitude of my thoughts within me, thy comforts delight my soul.” “Bless the Lord, O my soul,” &c. Ps. ciii. 1, 2.

3. *God was David's delight.* David seemed totally at a loss to express the ardency of his attachment unto God. “O God thou art my God,” &c. Ps. lxiii. 1. “As the hart panteth after the water brooks,” &c. Ps. xlii. 1, 2. When deprived of the public ordinances of religion, he appeared even to envy the sparrows who made their nests near unto the house of the Lord, Ps. lxxxiv. 3.

4. *God was David's defence.* David had many enemies; they who hated him, he said, “were more than the hairs of his head.” “But the Lord,” said he, “is my rock, and my fortress, and my deliverer,” &c. “When I cry unto thee then shall mine enemies turn back,” &c. Thus, Jehovah was the God of David, and after him Josiah sought; but let us describe,

II. THE MANNER HOW HE SOUGHT AFTER GOD. Information on this subject we collect by perusing his history.

1. *He sought God from a deep conviction that his conduct, and the conduct of Israel generally, was highly offensive to God, and that they were exposed to imminent peril.* For in his reign, while they were repairing the temple, they found a copy of the book of the law, and by reading that, and comparing their conduct with it, they saw the criminality of their lives; and that wrath was ready to come upon them. Let us read our Bibles, and compare ourselves with the records of revelation.

2. *He sought God in deep self-abasement of soul.* When he heard the book of the law read, he rent his clothes, and wept, see ver. 19, 27. Humility best becomes those who seek the Lord; a view of our sins, a consciousness of danger, a consideration of the majesty and glory of God, all should tend to humble us.

He sought God by destroying the idols out of the land. Manasseh the grandfather of Josiah had reared up altars for Balaam, made groves, and

worshipped the hosts of heaven. And Amon his father, had worshipped the carved image which Manasseh had made; but Josiah purged the land from idols, ver. 3, 4. Here we cannot exactly imitate him, but we should purge our hearts from idols: every human being is addicted to idolatry, to love the creature rather than the Creator; but God will have no rival, he will not give his glory to another.

3. *He sought God by restoring his true worship, and frequenting it.* The house of God had been neglected and forsaken, but Josiah got workmen, and builders, and artificers in great numbers, and they repaired the temple; and Josiah restored the passover, and the people celebrated it, "so that there had been nothing like it since the days of Samuel, neither did any of the kings of Israel keep such a passover as Josiah kept." Here too our conduct must necessarily vary a little from that of Josiah's; but those who would seek God, should frequent his public ordinances. These we have in abundance.

4. *He sought God with all his heart:*—"For like him, there was no king before him that turned to the Lord with all his heart, and with all his soul," &c. 2 Kings xxiii. 25 Here we must fully imitate Josiah; God demands our hearts, our whole hearts, and we must turn to him heartily, and in the most unreserved and decided manner.

III. THE PERIOD OF LIFE WHEN HE DID IT:—"While he was yet young," &c. "He was eight years old when he began to reign; and he reigned eight years, and then he began to "seek," &c. We should seek God while we are yet young, because,

1. *God is the best object whom we can seek.* "All nations before him are as nothing; and they are counted to him less than nothing and vanity." To whom then will you liken God? Examine all the objects which men are accustomed to seek after, and say which of those objects can be compared with the Lord?

2. *Youth is the best time for seeking God.* It is the *most acceptable* time with God, "I love them that love me, and those that seek me early shall find me." It is the *most pleasant* time with us. The yoke of Christ is then peculiarly easy, and his burden more than ordinarily light. How hard and difficult it is for old sinners to seek God! It is the only certain time we can command. How few live to see old age. "Man that is born of woman is of few days and full of trouble:" thousands die daily—life is but "vapour that appeareth for a little time and then vanisheth away." Let me then persuade you, young people, to imitate Josiah. Reflect on the advantages attendant on such a mode of conduct. *There are personal advantages*; seek God, and you will find him,—seek God, and you will live. *There are relative advantages*; Josiah's conduct stimulated others to seek God, and perhaps thousands and tens of thousands were benefited by his example. We cannot promise ourselves such extensive usefulness, but we may all be useful in a greater or less degree. How many of you, young people would gladden your parents by seeking the Lord! How useful might you be to your juvenile companion! But many young persons perceive no necessity for seeking the Lord; but this necessity exists, whether you see it or not. Oh! how awfully are you deceived! Others attach a degree of meanness to this exercise. To such we say, look at Joseph, Samuel, Solomon, Abijah, Danie, Timothy, &c. But some have suffered the morning of their lives to pass away without seeking God: to such we address a word of exhortation, reproof, and encouragement.

YOUTHFUL PIETY.

Jer. ii. 2, 3.—Go, and cry in the ears of Jerusalem, saying, Thus saith the Lord, I remember thee, the kindness of thy youth, the love of thine espousals, when thou wentest after me in the wilderness, in a land that was not sown. Israel was holiness to the Lord, and the first fruits of his increase. (P.)

Now, in order that we may have our minds duly affected with the subject, it will be necessary,

I. TO CONSIDER THE RICH AND GLOWING DESCRIPTION OF YOUTHFUL PIETY WHICH IS HERE GIVEN.

It is figurative language; but the figure is formed from reality, and Israel devoted to the God of Abraham is what the prophet intended to describe. And what is it in reference to youthful piety which God remembers?

1. *Its ardent affection*; “I remember the kindness of thy youth;” the glow of strong feeling which characterized thee. Young people feel greatly that which occupies their attention: the religion of the young is seldom the cold philosophic speculation or experience of age.

2. That the deep interest which you felt in religion was apparent in a *union of the soul to Christ*. “I remember the love of thine espousals.” The Redeemer won you by his love; you felt the bond, and devoted yourselves to the Saviour.

3. Character of youthful piety; *it is a going after God*. “When thou wentest after me,” &c. Your religion was not an invention of your own; it was not some worldly plan. It was the religion of the Scripture; it was clothed with an authoritative, “Thus saith the Lord.”

4. Acceptable youthful religion is *not discouraged by difficulties and troubles*. When was it that Israel went after the Lord? “In the wilderness, in a land that was not sown.” When there were no corn fields to gladden the eyes, and no water to quench the thirst; when they had nothing to live upon but the word, and presence, and Spirit of God. True religion is not that of fashion and custom, but that which God requires.

5. *The religion of an accepted youth is a religion of holiness*. Holiness is the character which he adopts, the atmosphere in which he breathes. “Israel was holiness unto the Lord.”

Such is a brief description of the early piety which God delights to view in young people who are called by his name. I hasten

II. TO NOTICE THE ASPECT WHICH THE DIVINE REMEMBRANCE OF YOUTHFUL PIETY MAY HAVE ON DIFFERENT CIRCUMSTANCES OF LIFE.

You may forget it, but HE never does. Your book of remembrance may be reduced to ashes, but his book remains, and every character in it is indelible. Two views may be taken of this remembrance.

1. *A view of approbation*. What a delightful view of early religion is this, that it is remembered with approbation! “I remember thee!”—And when is it that almighty God remembers with approbation and pleasure these traces of early piety?

When you are successfully struggling with the temptations of the world. I know that youth are exposed to strong temptations; but when you are struggling hard to maintain that integrity of character of which the world aims to deprive you; when you cultivate tempers which make you a derision to those around you; when you renounce pleasure rather than displease God; when you hold fast the beginning of your confidence steadfast unto the end, however it may be assailed and shaken: then God is well pleased.

and he says, "I remember thee, the kindness of thy youth," &c. Your early religion was not in vain; the impressions made in youth accompany you in your course of duty, and you still walk humbly with your God.

When you act under their influence in promoting the cause of truth and holiness. A pious youth is seldom slothful. Let a plan of usefulness be proposed, and who shall engage in it?—the young. They may not have all the means and all the prudence of the more aged, but theirs is the activity.

When its possessors are sunk into deep affliction. When laid on beds of sickness, and the world seems to be receding, O what delightful support do they then derive from the kindness of their youth, and the love of their espousals! And when they meet with disappointments in life; when difficulties rise in their path, and they know not which way to turn, what a satisfaction to think on the way in which they have walked before God!

When young people come to be old people. This will be the case if God permit; and I earnestly wish it may be so with those whom I address. Then, the remembrance of youthful piety taken by the blessed God, sheds a richer and a calmer satisfaction over the mind of the aged disciple, than anything else in the world can possibly yield.—And, finally,

In a dying hour. I need not carry the thought beyond this point. And tell me, which will afford greatest pleasure to the mind; that the Father of spirits has been loved and honored, or that he has been forsaken? Then, oh then it is he says with tenderest compassion, "I remember thee, the kindness of thy youth, &c.; and I will put under thee the everlasting arms, and will become thy portion for ever."

But this is the favorable side of the subject; and I should be unjust to my subject, and to the consciences of my hearers, if I were to leave it here. For the remembrance of youthful piety taken by God, may be

2. *A remembrance of regret and displeasure.* We are allowed to speak of the great God after the manner of men. He may act as though this were the language of his heart. I am afraid it is not necessary to go into the land of imagination, or to go beyond mournful facts, to demonstrate that many young persons, who appeared to be decidedly religious, have awfully sunk away. Some have gone into immoralities of the most flagrant character; others have become the disciples of a flimsy infidelity; and others who have not gone such lengths, have yet sunk down from the heights of piety into worldly conformity. Surely, I need not stay to *prove* this! Many of you can think of circumstances which prove all these particulars: you can remember one and another of your friends, dear to you as brothers and sisters, who have gone astray from the right path. Now, the truth is, God remembers these as much as he remembers the others; and it was to those in such a state that the words of the text were intended to be addressed. God is displeased, whether we think of it or not. That young man may have hardened himself in forgetfulness and sin, but let him know that God has it written in his book, that that young man is gone astray from his first principles. God is displeased; and very few who admit the being of a God, could bear in a solitary moment, or on the bed of sickness, or on the borders of the grave, to think of God's being displeased with them, without the deepest awe!

Let it be observed that the *day of divine desertion is not come*. You may have left God, but he has not left you. He has devised many means to bring you back. Sometimes he chastens your bodies with pain on the bed of sickness; at another time he plants difficulties around you which you cannot get through; sometimes he drives you to read your bibles; some-

times he brings you to hear a plain address like the present, when you are led to imagine that the preacher knows you intimately, and is describing your individual case. But if warnings be slighted, if providences be overlooked, if all means employed are in vain, if the youth determinately goes on to perdition;—the end will be dreadful indeed!—Such an end as will lead him to “mourn at the last, and to say, How have I hated instruction, and my heart despised reproof!” And to say it when “the harvest is past, when the summer is ended, and you are not saved!”

Such is the subject;—it is part pleasing and part painful—You may set the one against the other.

And now, there are various characters present whom I must address. Some here may say “The preacher has told my story, he has described me.” O cannot some of you say “Wisdom’s ways are ways of pleasantness, and her paths are paths of peace?” If so, go on your way rejoicing.

And cannot others say, and does not conscience oblige you to say, “We began with as good prospects as any around us, but the world beguiled us, and led us to our ruin!”—No, not to your ruin, if now you are wise enough to perceive your mistake, and apply to the only remedy.

And are there not some *thoughtless* ones here who will not properly apply to themselves what has been said? But, why not? What! my young friends, are you living among the professors of religion, and have *you* not devoted yourselves to God? Is there no kindness of youth, no going out after him, no following him, through the wilderness, no consecrated holiness, no first fruits? O, let me urge you to seek the Lord; and to seek him *now*, or it may be too late. Death is at the door;—the Judge is at the door, and you may be removed to judgment! O, why will you not accept the blessings of the gospel, and apply to that Saviour who would not reject you!

And now, *religious* young persons, I *congratulate* you; but I must also *warn* you. If you think yourselves secure, you are in more danger than others. Study your way; study your own hearts; study the religion of scripture. Be warned,—be animated,—be encouraged,—be faithful unto death.

There are some here who are in the *very bloom of life*, who can scarcely have had such feelings as have been described. O be persuaded now to come to Christ. He loves little children; he says; “Suffer little children to come unto me, and forbid them not.” He “gathers the lambs in his arms, and carries them in his bosom;” and the sooner you devote yourselves to him, the more likely are you to escape temptations. None are too young to die:—none are too young to live to Him in whose hands are “the keys of death and hell.”

Look forward to the judgment of the final day. The book of remembrance will then be opened, and each will be judged according to what is written in that book. He that is ready for death, is ready for judgement, which will follow death.

Finally, let me entreat young and old;—and let the impression sink deep into my own heart;—to “give all diligence that we may be found of Him in peace, without spot and blameless.” And to Him be praise and glory for ever and ever, *amen and amen!*

GENUINE RELIGION ILLUSTRATED.

2 Thessalonians i. 11, 12.—Wherefore also we pray always for you, that our God would count you worthy of this calling, and fulfil all the good pleasure of his goodness, and the work of faith with power: that the name of our Lord Jesus Christ may be glorified in you, and ye in him, according to the grace of our God and the Lord Jesus Christ. (Sk.)

THE passions are the chief springs of that activity which every where appears. Of these, hope and fear, as they awaken desire, or produce concern, and in either case create uneasiness, are among the principal causes which determine our various pursuits. But no subjects appear so calculated to excite those passions, as the joyful or awful prospects the gospel opens to our view. Do worldly enjoyments charm us? How much more inviting, “an inheritance incorruptible,” &c; angelic company, “fulness of joy, and pleasures for evermore.” Do earthly things alarm us? The day approaches when we shall see “A God in grandeur, and a world on fire.” “For the Lord Jesus shall be revealed,” &c, ver. 7—10. In reference to this revelation, and its important issues, the apostle says, “Wherefore also we pray,” &c, in which he seems to direct our attention to pure religion, in its nature,—source,—producing and sustaining principle,—end,—and measure.

I. RELIGION IN ITS NATURE;—a *worthiness*. “That our God would count you *worthy of this calling*,”—of the glorification mentioned, ver. 10. While we should carefully guard against self righteousness, we should be equally watchful against an opposite error, which, under the guise of humility, would lead us to abolish some of the most essential distinctions between the sinner and the saint; and should testify with the apostles, 2 Cor. v. 14—17; Eph. ii. 1. 10; 1 Thess. ii. 11, 12; 1 John iii. 9. Agreeably to these declarations is the character in ver. 10. “*His saints*” in whom he shall be glorified. This expresses,

1. *Their previous worthiness of condition*. They are in this life *sanctified ones*: that is, set apart from *common* uses, from worldliness as well as wickedness, to *sacred* service, 1 Peter ii. 9; Heb. xiii. 15; Rom. xii. 1; 1 Cor. x. 31. Nay they are children, heirs of God, &c, Gal. iv. 4—7. And having been thus honorably related, and so consistently employed, they are counted worthy to be approved and exalted, Matthew xxv. 23, 34—36, 40. And it expresses,

2. *Their previous worthiness of disposition*; their aptitude or meetness for glory. The word *saint*, (from *sanctus*.) means chaste, divine, heavenly, as well as *sacred*. Such the qualities of genuine christianity. ’Tis the circumcision of the heart, Rom. ii. 29; a transformation by the *renewing of the mind*, Rom. xii. 2; Eph. iv. 23; a participation of the *divine nature*, 2 Pet. i. 4. In *itself* pure and peaceable, James iii. 17; in *its operations* godly and benevolent, Phil. iii. 3; James i. 27. Contrast this with the *vileness* of sin, and with the inherent *worthlessness* of forms, creeds, &c.

II. RELIGION IN ITS SOURCE; the *goodness of God*; his free, spontaneous favour. “That he would fulfil *all the good pleasure of his goodness*.”

1. Here is an intimation that all their present religious views and feelings were the effects of divine grace. Hence the apostle prays, that God would count, or make, them worthy (Whitby, Doddridge, and A. Clarke,) of his kingdom, ver. 5, by *fulfilling* what he had begun.

2. That all is of grace will appear, if we contemplate man, as existing only in the *intention of his Maker*, or as really existing in his *state of in-*

nocence. Neither innocent man, nor innocent angel can have any *rightful claim*, on even a continuance of being. But,

3. Still less, if possible, has *fallen, sinful* man any good thing as matter of right. 'Tis of mercy that we are not in hell: Yet,

4. 'Tis "our Father's good pleasure" that we should *get religion*, Prov. iv. 7; Isa. lv. 1—3; Matt. vii. 7—11;—that we should *keep religion*, 1 Thess. v. 21; 1 Tim. i. 19; Rev. ii. 25, iii. 11;—that we should *improve in religion*, 2 Pet. i. 5—8, iii. 18;—and that we should *continue to improve*, 2 Cor. iv. 18; Eph. iii. 18, 19. Thus is fulfilled, or completed his "pleasure," which is "good,"—in its *author, operation, en'l*, 2 Cor. iv. 17.

This doctrine hides pride from man. "Salvation is of the Lord."

III. RELIGION IN ITS PRINCIPLE;—*faith*. "The work of *faith* with power." By faith here, we may understand the grace of faith, Heb. xi. 1; exercised on the word of faith, Gal. i. 23. This is,

1. *The producing principle* of religious affections and practice, Heb. xi.

6. It is such credence given to God's declarations, as determines the judgment and heart; and leads the subject of it to fear what is threatened, Heb. xi. 7;—to do what is commanded, Heb. xi. 8. 17;—and to expect, seek, embrace, what is promised, Heb. xi. 13, 19; Eph. ii. 8.

2. *The sustaining principle* of religious affections, &c. It sustains under threats and sufferings, Heb. xi. 35—39. It sustains against the smiles and allurements of the world, Gen. xxxix. 9; Heb. xi. 24—26. It "worketh by *love*," Gal. v. 6; 1 John iv. 19;—by *peace* and *joy*, Rom. v. 1, 2;—by *patience, hope*, &c, Rom. v. 3—5. In short, it attaches the heart to Him who is the "author and finisher of faith;" and at times wafts the soul to the upper regions, were it breathes a purer air, dwells amidst brighter prospects, and hears the hallelujahs of the blessed: so that its return to earth is felt as a return to pilgrimage and banishment, which the same faith, nevertheless, enables it patiently to bear, Heb. x. 35—39.

IV. RELIGION IN ITS END;—"That the name of our Lord Jesus Christ may be glorified in you and ye in (or by) him." The end is twofold:

1. *The glory of the Redeemer*:—"glorified in you." At present: his *love* appears glorious in his interesting himself about you;—his *wisdom* in instructing you;—his *holiness* in making you saints;—his *power* in preserving and protecting you;—his *faithfulness* in fulfilling all his engagements, &c. This also refers to *hereafter*, "when he shall come to be glorified in his saints," &c. verse 10. "He shall change our vile body, like unto his glorious body," &c. Phil. iii. 19, 20. The saints shall shine, *by reflecting* his radiance, and thus bring glory to his name.

2. *The glory of the redeemed*:—"and ye in him." This may apply to, 1. The glorified bodies they shall receive. 2. The glorious perfection of their minds; freed from all ignorance, error, and moral taint. 3. The glorious distinction with which they shall be favoured, Col. iii. 4. And, 4. The glorious company and mansions to which they shall be raised, Heb. xii. 22, 23; Rev. iii. 21. And it should be remarked, that the glory which they have through him, and that whereby he is glorified in them is glory derived from him, or resulting to him *in his character of Redeemer*, as the representative of the triune Deity. This the redeemed feel and acknowledge; hence their praises of both him that sitteth upon the throne and the Lamb, Rev. iv. 8—11, v. 11—14. This is certainly very much for us poor, *sinful, wretched, dying worms* to expect. But consider,

V. RELIGION IN ITS MEASURE OR RULE OF DISPENSATION;—"according to

the grace of our God, and the Lord Jesus Christ." This exactly and fully meets your case. For,

1. Are you *poor, insolvent, destitute of good*? It is "according to" the *freeness* of "the grace of God," &c. Luke vii, 42; Titus iii. 3—7.

2. Are you *guilty and vile*? It is "according to the" *riches* of "the grace," &c. Eph. i. 6, ii. 4—7. See "*the grace of our God*," John iii. 16; "*the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ*," 2 Cor. viii. 9; Eph. v. 2. Nothing farther could be given. God's thoughts are not as ours, &c. Rom. v. 6—12.

3. Are you *weak and ignorant*? It is "according to" the *tenderness, the sufficiency, and constancy* of "the grace," &c. Isa. xl. 11; 2 Cor. xii. 9; Heb. iv. 15, 16.

4. Are you *still doubtful and distressed*? It is "according to" the *former operations* of the same rich "grace;" in the cases of David, Manasseh, Paul, and others, who "had *much* forgiven," and were greatly blessed.

Careless sinner,—how will you meet that awful revelation? verse 7—9.

Formalists,—remember that you have to do with him "who trieth the reins and the heart." Unless the heart be renewed, he will not "account you worthy" of his unsuffering spiritual kingdom.

Penitents,—press into the enjoyment of happy piety. Grace is given you, and "he giveth more grace."

Believers,—be thankful, and expect a farther and more powerful "work of faith;" till "*all the good pleasure*" of divine goodness be fulfilled in you, Jude 24, 25.

THE FAITH AND HOPE OF JOB IN HIS REDEEMER.

Job xix. 25—27.—For I know that my Redeemer liveth, and that he shall stand at the latter day upon the earth: and though after my skin worms destroy this body, yet in my flesh shall I see God: whom I shall see for myself, and mine eyes shall behold, and not another; though my reins be consumed within me. (Sk.)

THIS celebrated text has been variously interpreted. While some, without any solid proof, have considered it as an interpolation, others have limited its meaning to the return of temporal felicity to Job; but if we carefully examine the preceding chapters, it will appear that he had no hope of deliverance from his calamitous circumstances, in the present world. Yet, while he was weighed down by a heavy load of afflictions, and misrepresented by his mistaken friends, he looked forward to the coming of his Redeemer; and had a comfortable assurance that he would avenge his wrongs, raise him from the dead, and bless him with the beatific vision. First, Job had a living Redeemer; secondly, he thought his afflictions would terminate in death; but, thirdly, he had a joyful hope of a happy resurrection from the dead.

1. JOB HAD A LIVING REDEEMER.

1. *The work of a redeemer is great and highly important.* First, he *pays a price* for the lost possession of his brother: "If thy brother be waxen poor, and hath sold away some of his possessions, and if any of his kin come to redeem it, then shall he redeem that which his brother sold," Lev. xxv. 25. Secondly, he *saves and delivers* him: "He saved them from the hand of him that hated them, and redeemed them from the hand of the ene-

my," *Psa. c/i. 10.* Thirdly he vindicates and avenges his brother: "*The revenger of blood himself shall slay the murderer,*" *Num. xxxv. 19.*

2. *Christ is the Redeemer of men.* He bought us with his blood. We "were not redeemed with corruptible things as silver and gold, but with the precious blood of Christ, as a Lamb without blemish and without spot," *1 Pet. i. 19.* He saves and delivers his people from the guilt and power, and from the pollution and punishment of sin. He "gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works," *Tit. ii. 14.* And he will vindicate and avenge his church: in allusion to this he says, "The day of vengeance is in mine heart, and the year of my redeemed is come," *Isa. lxiii. 4.*

3. *The Son of God, our great Redeemer, was living in the days of Job;* and he had a saving interest in him, in the afflictions which he suffered, from the devil and from men. He says, "My Redeemer liveth." If our Lord had no existence prior to his incarnation, Job should have spoken in the future tense, saying, "I know that my Redeemer shall live;" but he spake correctly, for his Redeemer was then living. He had glory with the Father "before the world was," *John xvii. 5.* He was rich in a prior state of existence, yet for our sakes "he became poor," *2 Cor. viii. 9.* He was the only begotten Son of the Father, *John iii. 16.*

4. *But how does it appear that the Redeemer of Job was the Son of God?* From these words, "he shall stand at the latter day upon the earth." This could not be affirmed of any *goel*, or kinsman of Job, who was then living; but the prediction, if applied to Jesus, is exceedingly appropriate. It was in *part* fulfilled when he appeared in our nature; for "when the fulness of time was come, God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law," *Gal. iv. 4.* But it will be *completely* fulfilled when he arises in judgment; for the words may be rendered, "*he shall arise*" from his seat, and stand upon his feet, as a judge, to give sentence or to execute judgment. This was the posture in which judges always delivered their sentence; and hence we frequently read, in the Scriptures, of God arising to sentence, *Job xxxi. 14; Psa. lxxiv. 22, lxxxii. 8.*

5. *Job knew his divine Redeemer.* But how did he attain that knowledge? It might be by tradition. God had promised a Saviour and deliverer, and that promise was handed down from one generation to another. Besides, the promise which was given to Abraham, "In thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed," was probably well known to Job; but it is most probable he knew his Redeemer by immediate revelation. God might make a discovery of this great truth to him,—first, to support him in his unparalleled affliction; and, secondly, to comfort and encourage the church in after ages

II. PIOUS JOB THOUGHT HIS AFFLICTION WOULD TERMINATE IN DEATH.

1. *When he spake the words of the text, his skin was destroyed.* He fell into the hands of Satan by the permission of the Lord: and he smote him with sore boils, from the sole of his foot unto his crown, *chap. ii. 6, 7.* These were fiery eruptions, or ulcerous eating sores, which destroyed the skin. "And he took him a potsherd to scrape himself withal." For *scrape*, says a learned author, the Chaldee and Arabic use a word commonly applied to pulling leaves and bark off from the tree. How deplorable was the state of Job, when scraping himself with potsherds! Well might he say, "Have pity upon me, have pity upon me, oh ye my friends!" *verse 21.*

2. *After his skin, he expected his whole body to be destroyed.* The word *worms* is not in the original, but is supplied by the translators; they

seem to have conjectured that his skin was destroyed by worms, and that they would proceed to destroy the body. How far this opinion is correct, we know not; but Job certainly had an idea, that the destruction of the whole body would speedily follow the destruction of the skin. The word *body* is also supplied, and properly, because that was certainly intended.

3. *Death and the grave, with their solemn attendants, close every earthly prospect of that deeply afflicted, but eminently holy man* He afterwards said, "I know thou wilt bring me to death, and to the house appointed for all living," Job xxx. 23. And we also must die; but when we know not. These bodies, however beautiful and strong, will perish in the grave. "The righteous perisheth, and no man layeth it to heart," Isa. lvii. 1. But, like Job, he hopes to rise again.

III. JOB HAD A JOYFUL HOPE OF A RESURRECTION FROM THE DEAD.

1. He positively affirms, that, after the destruction of his body, he *should see God in his flesh*. But how can that be the case, either with him or others, if the dead rise not. Man was created with a body, and will live in an embodied state, to all eternity; but that cannot be without a resurrection; because his earthly and material frame returns to dust, as a sad punishment of his apostacy from God, Gen. iii. 19. How God will raise the dead is unknown; but the fact is certain. It was revealed to Job, and has been indubitably proved by the resurrection of Jesus. With these eyes of flesh we shall see God our Saviour. What a happy sight! Then the sorrows of life will be past, death will be destroyed, and a blessed eternity will follow!

2. I shall see for *myself*, he says, "and mine eyes shall behold, and not another." Good men wish well to all; but they claim the blessings of grace and glory as their own. Others, no doubt, will see and enjoy the Redeemer; but I shall see and enjoy him for myself. He will appear in my cause; he will deliver me from death and the grave; he will vindicate my character; and he will avenge me of my foes. And all this will take place, though my reins, or vitals, are consumed within me; for all things are possible with God; and he who made the world can raise the dead.

INFERENCES.

1. Jesus has been the hope of pious men in all ages. Abraham rejoiced to see his day, "and he saw it and was glad," John viii. 56. Moses and all the prophets foretold his coming; and gave witness, "that through his name whosoever believeth in him shall receive remission of sins," Acts x. 43.

2. He is our only Redeemer and Saviour. We are lost, but he came to seek and to save us; we have enemies, but he has conquered them; we are dead, but we may live by him for ever.

3. It is both our duty and our privilege to renounce our own righteousness; to trust in him only; to love and honor him; and to follow him in the regeneration, through evil report and good report. Amen.

THE POOR MAN'S ACCOUNT OF HIMSELF.

Ps. xxxiv. 6.—This poor man cried, and the Lord heard him and saved him out of all his troubles. (Sk.)

THERE is an important reality in religion, which is enjoyed by all true believers. They do not follow cunningly devised fables, but receive the truth as it is in Jesus. They are enlightened, quickened, pardoned, adopted, and “renewed in righteousness and true holiness.” And having obtained mercy of the Lord, they highly extol the riches of his grace. They become zealous in his cause, and greatly rejoice in the prosperity of Zion. They recommend religion to all around them, and earnestly desire the universal extension of its influence. And hence David, as a subject of saving grace, breathes in this psalm a spirit of “burning charity” and fervent zeal. In the preceding context he invites all men to unite with him to magnify and praise the Lord for all his benefits; and in the text he encourages them, by the consideration of his own successful application to the throne of grace:—“This poor man cried,” &c. These words describe—a humble character—a gracious privilege—and a happy deliverance.

I. A HUMBLE CHARACTER;—“*This poor man.*” It is highly probable that David here speaks of himself. Notwithstanding the dignity of his station as a *king*, he was deeply humble before God as a *saint*. Though he was not *temporally poor* as a man, he was *spiritually poor* and destitute as a sinner; and *consciously poor* and dependant as a believer. This language was therefore, a faithful description of his humble state and experience, as the man after God’s own heart. It is also uniformly applicable to two distinct characters of mankind, and may be justly adopted,

1. *By the contrite penitent.* Such are thoroughly convinced of their depravity and sinfulness; and that naturally in them “dwelleth no good thing.” They are entirely destitute of all the spiritual riches of knowledge, purity, and happiness; and are ignorant, guilty, polluted, and miserable. Rev. iii. 17. They are “without Christ, having no hope, and without God in the world.” What an awful state of poverty and wretchedness is this! And yet such is the deplorable condition of all mankind by nature!—And those who truly feel their sinful and perishing state, readily acknowledge their total destitution of spiritual good; and their utter insufficiency to please God, or save themselves. And hence the true penitent frequently exclaims, “Wo is me! for I am undone—God be merciful to me a sinner—Lord, save, or I perish,” Ps. li. 17; Isa. lxvi. 2.

2. *By the humble believer.* Though such characters are partakers of the “unsearchable riches of Christ,” they are still needy and dependant. They have many wants to be supplied,—many evils to be removed,—many enemies to overcome,—many difficulties to encounter,—many blessings to secure,—many dangers to escape,—many duties to perform;—and without Christ they can do nothing. Hence they deeply feel their helplessness and dependance on God, and have no confidence in the flesh. They are grateful for what they already enjoy; but their present attainments are very deficient. They have not already attained, neither are already perfect. Though they are “poor and needy, yet the Lord thinketh upon them for good.” They are poor in spirit, but rich in faith, and heirs of heaven. The text also specifies,

II. A GRACIOUS PRIVILEGE;—“*This poor man cried, and the Lord heard him.*” David was a man of eminent devotion. In all his afflictions and

trials, he had recourse to God, and gave himself unto prayer. Nor did he pray in vain. In the case before us he mentions,

1. *The object of his worship*;—"The Lord." He was no profane idolater, but a devout worshipper of the God of Israel. He had *correct views of his character*, as the only object of religious adoration, and the Giver of every good and perfect gift, Ps. xviii. 1—3. He was *acquainted with his will*; and hence he knew that it was both his duty and interest to wait upon him, and worship him in the beauty of holiness, Ps. xcv. 6, 7. He also *trusted in his name*, and expected salvation from him, Ps. lxii. 1, 2. He therefore carefully cultivated a spirit of prayer, and lived in holy fellowship with the covenant God of his fathers.

2. *The nature of his devotion*;—He "*cried to the Lord*." This intimates *earnestness*. He did not merely ask, nor seek; but he *cried* and *agonized*, like a person deeply distressed, or earnestly engaged in an important pursuit, Gen. xxxii. 24—26.—It includes *confidence*. He believed that God both *could* and *would* help and deliver him. He had frequently found it good to draw near unto him, and was therefore encouraged to trust in him for every blessing, Ps. cxxxiii. 1, 2.—It also implies *perseverance*. His crying to the Lord was not a *single* or *occasional* act of devotion; but his *regular* and *daily* practice, Ps. cxix. 164. He felt the constant necessity of divine succor and protection, which induced him fervently, faithfully, and diligently, to cry unto the Lord for mercy, and grace to help in time of need.

3. *The success of his prayer*;—"And the Lord *heard* him." He is never inattentive to the cries and tears of his people, Isa. lix. 1.—"*His eyes* are over the righteous, and his ears are open unto their prayers."—He *sees* all their desires,—understands their "*groanings* which cannot be uttered,"—and hears all their supplications and thanksgivings both in public and in private, Ps. xl. 1.—He *accepts* their prayers. They approach him in the way of his own appointment, and worship him in spirit and in truth, Prov. xv. 8.—He *answers* their prayers. This was the case with the Psalmist; he "*cried to the Lord*," and he saved him in the day of trouble. The answers of faithful prayer are always *certain*, *seasonable*, and *compassionate*; for "*like as a father pitieth his children, so the Lord pitieth them that fear him*," Psa. xci. 15, 16; Matt. vii. 11; 1 John v. 14, 15.—The text records,

III. A HAPPY DELIVERANCE;—"The Lord *saved* him out of all his troubles."—Whether David here refers to some particular season of calamity or not, is uncertain; but his declaration is highly consolatory, and suggests the following instructions for the encouragement of the saints.

1. *They are frequently subjects of troubles*. This requires no argument to prove it: the Scriptures assure us, that this has always been the case; and experience sufficiently corroborates the fact. Yea, "*many are the afflictions of the righteous*," in this vale of tears.—They are subject to the common trials of human life, and are often chastised by the Lord for their profit in holiness, Heb. xii. 6—11.—They are frequently exercised with personal, domestic, spiritual, and temporal troubles; all of which are designed to "*work together for their good*."

2. *They are supported under their troubles*. They are not left to bear them alone; the Lord is with them, and into his hands they commit the keeping of their souls. They approach him with confidence, and find him to be their "*refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble*," Isa. xliii. 2; and lxiii. 9.—In their most trying seasons, his grace is sufficient for them, and will encourage them to possess their souls in patience. Hence

they feel fully resigned to the will of God, trusting in his wisdom and goodness, and "cast all their care upon him, for he careth for them."

3. *They shall be delivered from their troubles.* Thus the Psalmist and all the primitive saints, were saved from their sins and enemies, and out of all their troubles and afflictions. And God still delivers his people from many of their troubles while here, which they gratefully acknowledge with David in the text, Ps. ciii. 1—4. But whilst they are in a world of tribulation, their deliverance is not complete. "There remaineth therefore a rest to the people of God;" where they shall be perfectly safe from all their troubles, both of body and mind, and "God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes," Isa. xxxv. 10.

This subject suggests,

1. The awful state of the prayerless, Job xxi. 15.—Arise and call upon God, that you perish not.

2. The manner in which we should come unto God.—It must be humble, fervent, and incessant. And,

3. The consolation and encouragement of the righteous. "Lift up your heads, for your redemption draweth nigh."

THE FATHER HONORS THE SERVANTS OF HIS SON.

John xii. 26.—If any man serve me, him will my Father honor. (Sk.)

EARTHLY monarchs are the fountains of temporal honors; but God is the fountain of eternal honors. The God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ honors all who serve his beloved Son; and the honor which he confers, is as much above what the world can give, as the heavens are above the earth. Nor is this all; for while the honors which men receive of one another, are lost in death, those which God bestows, run on for ever. The servants of Jesus are now despised, as insignificant and worthless persons; but ere long they will shine as the brightness of the firmament Dan. xii. 3.

I. MAKE A FEW OBSERVATIONS ON THE SERVICE OF CHRIST.

1. *Jesus has high claims on our services.* He created us: for "all things were made by him; and without him was not any thing made that was made," John i. 3. And is it not right that our Creator should govern us? Surely the creature is bound to obey the Author of his being! But he has claims on our services as our Redeemer; "For ye are bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God's;" 1 Cor. v. 20. It will not be denied, by any man of reflection, that we should serve him, who has bought us with his precious blood. 1 Pet. i. 18, 19.

2. *He is our only Master;* "One is your Master, even Christ," Matt. xxiii. 8. Now, as a master has a right to command, and as servants are bound to obey, those who refuse obedience to Jesus, cannot, consistently, call him Master. The church is a house or family, and Christ is the governor of the house. The family is placed under his guidance and government, and every one should do what he commands. If his authority be denied, and if his commands be disobeyed, the whole family will fall into disorder; and when a house is divided against itself, it cannot stand, Matt. xii. 25.

3. *Our Lord is a good Master.* His work is pleasant in itself, and easy to his servants. He says, "My yoke is easy, and my burden is light," Matt. x. 30. He affords plentiful support to his servants, so that they never hunger, nor do they ever thirst, John vi. 35. And he will give great rewards, Rev. xxii. 14. These are things which are most agreeable to servants. Hence, when we voluntarily enter into service, we inquire after the character of the master; the nature of his employments; the support which he affords; and the rewards which he offers. We are aware that every blessing bestowed by our Master is the effect of grace; but it is as much our own as if we had merited it, and yet we humbly own that we are but unprofitable servants, Luke xvii. 10.

4. *The servants of Christ should obey him in all things.* His work is various: but whatever he commands is absolutely necessary. One serves him in the ministry of the word, and is ready, at his command, to go into all the world to preach the everlasting gospel, Mark xvi. 15. Another is employed in defending his cause by sound argument, being set for the defence of the gospel, Phil. i. 17. And all are required to practice those evangelical duties which relate to themselves, to men in general, and to God in particular; or, as the apostle Paul says, to "live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world," Titus ii. 12. Thus all are *employed*; all are *well* employed; and all are *constantly* employed.

5. *We should serve Christ in a right way.* Faithfulness is expected in a servant: and we should be faithful in all things, 1 Cor. iv. 2. Cheerfulness is necessary; a gloomy temper shows dissatisfaction, and is a reflection on our Master. Constancy and perseverance are necessary; for "he that endureth to the end shall be saved," Matt. x. 22. What we do, should be done with a single eye; "The light of the body is the eye: if therefore thine eye be single, thy whole body shall be full of light," Matt. vi. 22.

6. *We should be ever ready to obey the Son of God.* Paul, the apostle, required Timothy to be "*instant in season, and out of season*," 2 Tim. iv. 2. The ear should be constantly open to hear the commands of Christ; and the heart should be constantly disposed to obey him, whether it be convenient or inconvenient to ourselves. When eastern despots command their slaves, it is a common reply, "To hear is to obey." And shall not we be always ready to obey our Lord, the moment we hear his voice.

II. CONSIDER THE HONORS WHICH THE FATHER CONFERS ON THE SERVANTS OF HIS SON.

1. *The service of Christ will not procure the honors of the world;*—"If ye were of the world, the world would love his own; but because ye are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hateth you," John xv. 19. Learning, conquest, and wealth, are honored by men of the world; but holy obedience to Jesus Christ, is despised and contemned by men in general. But the servants of Jesus sit loose to human honors; they desire the good opinion of the wise and holy, but the good opinion of others is no credit to any man.

2. *If any man serve Christ he is honored with the friendship of God.* He has fellowship with the Father and with the Son, 1 John i. 3. Abraham was called the friend of God; and "they which be of faith are blessed with faithful Abraham," James ii. 23; Gal. iii. 9. "The Lord spake to Moses face to face, as a man speaketh to his friend;" and he is a friend to the truly pious, who sticketh closer than a brother, Exodus xxxiii. 11; Prov. xviii. 24. The friendship of great men is deemed an honor; but what is that when compared with the friendship of God?

3. *Every servant of Christ is honored with the special presence of God.* "If a man love me, he will keep my words: and my Father will love him, and we will come unto him, and make our abode with him," John xiv. 23. God dwells with the servants of Jesus, to direct their path in life; to defend them in the hour of danger; and to comfort them in the hour of affliction. His presence is a high honor, of which no man is worthy; but true believers enjoy it as their privilege, through the merit of Christ. God is at their right hand, and therefore they cannot be moved, Ps. xvi. 8. And he is with them in the waters and fires of affliction, Isa. xliii. 2.

4. *The servant of Christ is honored with a new nature.* All the tempers and dispositions of the soul, which are accounted great and good, are planted in his heart. He is generous to all who are in want; brave in the Christian warfare; pure in all his motives and ends; faithful to God and man; and upright in all his dealings. He is a dear child of God, and as far as grace enables him, he is a follower of God, Eph. v. 1. And is there any honor equal to this?

5. *Lofty titles are conferred on the servants of Christ.* They are called *elect*, or chosen; and are *precious*, or valuable, 1 Pet. ii. 6. They are called *sons* of God, 1 John iii. 2. They are the *bride* of Christ, Rev. xxi. 9. All their titles are expressions of real worth; and not like the flattering titles which are given to men, Job xxxii. 21. They are men of God; "a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, and a peculiar people," 1 Pet. ii. 9.

6. *The servant of Christ will be honored by the Father in the hour of death.* In death, the honors of the world come to an end; but in that awful hour the good man is highly honored. God is with him; holy angels minister unto him; he is about to be advanced to high preferment; and he is holy and happy. He can say, "My flesh and my heart faileth, but God is the strength of my heart and my portion for ever," Ps. lxxiii. 26.

7. *Honor will be put upon the servants of Christ in the end of the world.* They will rise to glory, 1 Cor. xv. 43. They will stand approved in the day of judgment, 1 John iv. 17. They will be openly invited to inherit the kingdom of God, Matt. xxv. 34. They will be assessors with Christ in the judgment, 1 Cor. vi. 2. Yea, they will judge angels, ver. 3.

8. *And eternal honors will be conferred on them in the kingdom of God.* When time is swallowed up in the ocean of eternity, they will wear the crown of life, James i. 12. They will be honored with the presence of God and the Lamb; with the society of angels and saints; with great personal glory; with high employments; with exalted seats; and with immortality, Rev. xxi. 3. 4.

INFERENCES.

1. Christian honors infinitely surpass the honors of the world. They are real, substantial, great, and durable; but those of the world are imaginary, empty, trifling, and momentary.

2. Human honors are frequently obtained by war, bribes, flattery, wealth and power; but divine honors are obtained by repentance, faith, holiness, and the grace of God in Christ Jesus.

3. Proud men will be humbled; their greatness will perish with the world. Therefore, "Let not thine heart envy sinners: but be thou in the fear of the Lord all the day long," Prov. xxiii. 17.

4. We should set a great value on divine honors; and if human honors fall to our lot, we should be humble. And while we are honored, either by providence or grace, let us give the glory to God, 1 Tim. i. 17

THE PIOUS SUFFERER EXHORTED TO GLORIFY GOD.

1 Pet. iv. 16.—Yet if any man suffer as a Christian, let him not be ashamed; but let him glorify God on this behalf. (Sk.)

IN the latter part of the first age, the rage of Jews and Gentiles was exceedingly stimulated by the prevalence of the gospel; the apostles, therefore, considered themselves as especially called to comfort and encourage their suffering brethren. With this view, Peter reminded the disciples of Christ of the obligations they were under to suffer for their religion, and suggested a variety of motives to persuade them to do it cheerfully. See context; also chap. iii. 14—18. We are not in similar circumstances with the first christians: hence, the danger of our religion being superficial; yet, if any man's piety and decision of character subject him to suffering, "let him not be ashamed." We may therefore state,

I. WHAT IS IMPLIED IN SUFFERING AS A CHRISTIAN.

II. WHY CHARACTERS WHO THUS SUFFER SHOULD NOT BE ASHAMED.

III. THEIR DUTY UNDER SUFFERING CIRCUMSTANCES.

1. WHAT IS IMPLIED, &c. The term christian, was given to the disciples of Christ first at Antioch, and is used in three places only in the New Testament, viz. here; in Acts xi. 26; and xxvi. 28. It imports nothing less than an experimental and practical believer in the Lord Jesus Christ. To suffer as a christian, is,

1. *To suffer in the character of a christian.* Where piety has its seat in the heart, it will appear in the life; hence believers are the salt of the earth, to spread a salutary influence; and save the world from moral putrefaction:—the light of the world; as such they are to shine brighter and brighter to the perfect day;—a city set on a hill, to be seen and identified by all, Matt. v. 13—16. It was never the design of the Head of the church that any of its members should seclude themselves from society, John xvii. 15. It is the duty of all who believe in Christ to confess him before men, Matt. x. 32, 33; and to conceal our religion is a tacit denial of Christ, and opposed to the doctrine of our text.

2. *To suffer for discharging the duties of a christian.* Christianity frees its possessors from the slavery of custom; they are governed by the high principles of religion. In the service of God, like Joshua, xxiv. 15, and Daniel vi. 10, they are undaunted. Whatever is the opinion of the world, the work of God is to them of paramount importance. In domestic life, they are faithful, conscientious, and obliging; as religious characters, they are fixed in their views, and bold in their profession; in the civil world, they are true and just in all their doings, embodying principle and conscience in each action; while, as subjects of the realm, they are peaceable and quiet. If, therefore, such a conduct subject them to suffering, "let them not be ashamed."

3. *To suffer in the spirit of a christian.* If human enemies rise against you, think it not strange, but "in patience possess ye your souls," Luke xxi. 19. Should their unkindness and sin lead to an unjust impeachment of your character, the injury of your person or circumstances, suffer not the spirit of revenge to betray you into sin. "Recompense no man evil for evil," Rom. xii. 17; but, if it be possible, "live peaceably with all men," ver. 18; and "if thine enemy hunger, feed him," ver. 20, 21. Like your Lord, be ready to forgive, and show that you have added to your courage, patience, &c. 2 Pet. i. 5—7. Let not persecu

tion either in its mild or terrific forms, intimidate you; remember him, "who, when he was reviled, reviled not again." &c. 1 Pet. ii. 23; take also for your example the apostles of our Lord, who would say, "Being reviled, we bless," &c. 1 Cor. xii. 13. Let that mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus, Phil. ii. 5. Let us therefore consider,

II. WHY CHARACTERS WHO THUS SUFFER SHOULD NOT BE ASHAMED.

1. *Because they suffer innocently.* "If any man suffer as a murderer, or as a thief, or as an evil doer, or as a busy body in other men's matters," he has cause to be ashamed; but if innocent, his record is with God, and he partakes of that satisfaction which is the good man's inheritance, Prov. xiv. 14. Let the craft and subtlety of the devil and man be directed against you, the shield of innocence will repel every dart. "Blessed are ye when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely for my sake," &c. Matthew v. 10—12.

2. *They suffer in a good cause.* Not like the man whom justice has arrested for dishonesty—the law condemned for perjury, or sentenced to death for murder; theirs is the cause of truth, justice, mercy, benevolence, and piety. Their business is to get good, and do good—to injure no one by word or deed; and while their motto is "Holiness to the Lord," and in all things seek to glorify him who has bought them with his blood, they should not be ashamed.

3. *They suffer from the purest motive.* Their conscientious exactness is not the result of fostered peculiarity, or with a view to be singular. God is their witness, that with sincerity and simplicity they wish to walk before him. His will is their law—his glory their end; and they esteem the approbation of God more than any thing this world can afford.

4. *They suffer for a blessed Master.* He is a high Priest who is touched with a feeling of their infirmities, Heb. iv. 15; and what they suffer for him, though painful, will conduce to their good, Rom. viii. 28; 2 Cor. iv. 16—18. "Think it not strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you," &c. ver. 12, 13; "for unto you it is given, in the behalf of Christ, not only to believe on him, but also to suffer for his sake," Phil. i. 29; "and if we suffer, we shall also reign with him," 2 Tim. ii. 12.

4. *They suffer in imitation of the brightest examples.* Look at the catalogue of patriarchs, kings, priests, and prophets, Heb. xi. whose intrepidity, faith, patience, and purity, they follow. They have a noble army of martyrs before their eyes; and as their great example, a suffering Saviour, Heb. xii. 1—3. Let us therefore consider,

III. THEIR DUTY UNDER SUFFERING CIRCUMSTANCES; viz. to "glorify God on this behalf." We are not, however, to suppose that man can add any thing to the essential glory of God; but they are to glorify God by,

1. *Devoutly acknowledging Him and his gifts,* 1 Chronicles xxix. 11, 12; confessing him "worthy to receive honor, glory, might, and majesty," Rev. iv. 11. The very circumstance of their suffering should prompt them to this.

2. *By firmness in the day of trial.* Let them consider Him who endured the contradiction of sinners against himself, and not be discouraged; let nothing shake their firmness, 1 Cor. xv. 58; but imitate the example of the disciples, who continued with their Lord in his temptations. Luke xxii. 28, 29. When the service of God demands their attention, let not secondary considerations discourage them. He who, for fear of persecution, or for the sake of his temporal interest, abandons religion, shall lose his soul; and he who, in the time of persecution, abjures the religion of

Christ, is not only in danger of losing his soul, but his life, Matt. x. 39; "He that findeth his life, shall lose it." That was literally fulfilled in Archbishop Cranmer, who, for confessing Christ against the devil and the pope, was ordered to be burnt: to save his life, he recanted, and was, notwithstanding, burnt. In the service of God we must persevere, fearless of consequences. Honor God, and God will honor you, 1 Sam. ii. 30.

3. *By a faithful and patient endurance of suffering.* Should conflicts increase, friends forsake, and enemies combine against you, "rejoice inasmuch as ye are partakers of Christ's sufferings," &c. ver. 13. Think it not strange if an ungodly world should hate you, John xv. 18. "All that will live godly in Christ Jesus, shall suffer persecution," 2 Tim. iii. 12; therefore, "in your patience, possess your souls," Luke xxi. 19. "Let patience have her perfect work," James i. 4; and glorify God in the exercise of that grace which his own hand has planted, and which his providence has suffered to be exercised.

To this act of glorifying God, they are encouraged from

1. *The declarations and promises he has made.* These are many, great, and various, Isaiah xli. 10, xliii. 1, 2, liv. 17; Matt. x. 32; James i. 12; Rev. ii. 10, xxii. 7.

2. *The honor it will confer upon them.* Let the warrior wave his blood-stained laurel, boast of the immensity of his possessions, purchased by the gore of his fellow men, and spread his fame from pole to pole;—a nobler award awaits *them*; their names shall continue when the annals of history are destroyed—their inheritance will not fade away—their memorial will endure for ever, 1 Pet. i. 3—5; Ps. cxii. 6.

IMPROVEMENT.

1. *Let us examine our experience by this test.* Do I believe in, and love the Lord Jesus Christ? Am I modestly, yet boldly, confessing him before the world? Can I patiently and cheerfully suffer for his sake?

2. *Let us encourage ourselves in the Lord.* In such a cause, for such a Master, with such promises, and in the strength of grace, let us pursue our course. Victory, rest, and glory, are before us.

3. *Let us pray for our persecutors.* Their state is awful—it is dangerous. May the Lord our God grant them repentance unto life.

WALKING IN TRUTH.

3 John 4.—I have no greater joy than to hear that my children walk in truth. (Sk.)

MINISTERS of our Lord Jesus Christ are appointed to watch over the souls of men; and the great day is fast approaching, when they must give an account of the charge committed to their care, Heb. xiii. 7. The apostles of our Lord excelled in the discharge of this duty; and those who are called to the same work, should copy after their example; then, being influenced by the apostolic spirit, they will rejoice *greatly*, like the beloved John, when their children enjoy spiritual health, and walk in truth. The joys of the apostle, both as a Christian and a minister, were many and great; but he asserts, in our text, that he had no greater joy than to hear that his children walked in truth.

I. THE CHILDREN OF THE APOSTLE JOHN WALKED IN TRUTH. His children were real Christians, both in heart and life; and all such walk in truth. But, as Pilate said to Jesus, "What is truth?"

1. *Truth refers to our thoughts, words, and actions.* Our thoughts are true, when we think of things as they are; our words are true, when we speak as we think; and our actions are true, when they are conformable to the Holy Scriptures; for then we "obey the truth," Rom. ii. 8. That we may think correctly, let us examine things carefully, 1 Thess. v. 21; that we may speak exactly, let us keep the door of our lips, Ps. cxli. 3; and that we may act the truth, let us live as in the immediate presence of the Lord, Ps. xvi. 8.

2. *The word of God, including both the Old Testament and the New, is a revelation of the truth.* That blessed book is the only infallible rule of faith and practice: but the word *truth*, in our text, may particularly refer to the gospel of God our Saviour, which, as a system of truth, is the perfection of all previous revelations, Gal. iii. 1. "The New Testament," says Locke, "has God for its author; salvation for its end; and truth, without any mixture of error, for its matter."

3. *Jesus Christ, our Divine Teacher, is called the Truth.* In his humble birth, holy life, painful death, blessed resurrection, and glorious ascension, all the promises, prophecies, and types of the Old Testament, relating to the Messiah, were *fully verified*; and while he dwelt on earth, he taught the truth of God in all its beauty and fulness. We read Socrates, Plato, Seneca, Cicero, and other eminently learned men, with caution, because there is a mixture of truth and error in all their works; but when we read the discourses of our adorable Saviour, we feel confidence and assurance, because he knew all things, and taught the way of God in truth, Matt. xxii. 16.

4. *To walk in truth, implies a strict conformity to its sacred dictates, in our experience, and in all our works and ways.* Here it may be observed, that God has not revealed truth merely to amuse us, or to satisfy our curiosity, but with a view to practical purposes; that it is one thing to believe and profess truth, and another to walk in it, Rom. i. 18; that faith and practice, so often *separated*, should be constantly *united*; and, finally, that he walks in truth, in every point of view, who has an enlightened understanding, a renewed heart, an edifying conversation, and a holy conduct, Isa. ii. 5; Ps. ci. 2; Eph. iv. 29; Rom. vi. 4.

5. *Those who walk in truth should be careful to hold it fast.* Solomon says, "Buy the truth, and sell it not," Prov. xxiii. 23. Rather part with wealth, fame, and even life, than truth. Be valiant for it, Jer. ix. 3; let your loins be girt with truth, Eph. vi. 14; be established in the truth, 2 Pet. i. 12; do nothing against the truth, 2 Cor. xiii. 8. That you may hold it fast, carefully recollect that it makes you *free*, John viii. 32; and that you are sanctified and purified through the truth, John xvii. 17; 1 Pet. i. 22.

6. *We should examine ourselves daily, whether we be in the truth, and how it affects our life and conversation.* Our knowledge is limited, and ever will be so: but are our views, as far as they extend, agreeable to truth; Is our experience in unison with the revealed truth of the written word? Are we advancing in sound and true experience? Is our conduct, in all things, consistent with truth? These inquiries, by the blessing of God, will promote our *love* of truth, and lead us to *honor* and obey it in all its requirements.

II. JOHN HAD NO GREATER JOY THAN TO HEAR OF HIS CHILDREN WALKING IN TRUTH.

1. *Joy implies gladness and exultation either in the possession or prospect of something which we deem good and excellent.* It is a lovely passion in a pious person; it exhilarates the spirits, even in afflictive and trying circumstances, 1 Cor. vi. 10; and produces a flowing tide of the most pleasurable feelings. No matter what our external circumstances may be; for, if we have religious joy in our hearts, we are substantially happy, and like Paul and Silas, can praise God at midnight, in a prison, though loaded with chains, Acts xvi. 25.

2. *Men of the world, who mind only earthly things, feel joy and gladness in the things of time and sense.* They are joyful and glad when their corn and their wine are increased, Ps. iv. 7; they joy in their own labor, and in their carnal pleasures, Eccl. ii. 10; they joy even in their vile hypocrisy and artful deceptions, Job xx. 5; yea, "folly is joy to him that is destitute of wisdom," Prov. xv. 21. But this joy, like the crackling of thorns under a pot, is but a sudden blaze, which is soon extinguished, Eccles. vii. 6. The *unsanctified* joy of Hamon was of short duration; and that which made his heart glad, led him to a gallows, Esther v. 9; vii. 10.

3. *But pious men joy in spiritual and eternal blessings, more than in the good things of this life, which are passing away.* The blessed operations of the Holy Ghost in their hearts are abundant sources of pure joy, Rom. xiv. 17; they joy in the God of their salvation, Heb. iii. 18; they receive the word with joy, 1 Thess. i. 6; they count it all joy when they fall into divers temptations or trials, James i. 2, and their joy is unspeakable and full of glory, 1 Pet. i. 8. It is similar to the joys of the blessed in heaven, and a sweet anticipation of eternal bliss; it is intended to comfort and cheer the hearts of the pious in this world of sin and sorrow; and, being furnished with matter of joy in every state, they are commanded to rejoice evermore, and in every thing to give thanks, 1 Thess. v. 16.

4. *Ministers of the gospel joy in the followers of Jesus, and especially in those whom they have been instrumental in turning to the Lord.* The apostle Paul expresses his feelings on this subject in the following words; "Ye are our joy and glory," 1 Thess. ii. 20. Under the influence of human weakness, a minister may feel joy when the people praise his sermons and extol his gifts; but, in his best moments, nothing affords him so much joy as the success of his labors, in the conversion of sinners, and the edification of saints. He rejoices in the prosperity of believers, as a parent rejoices in the prosperity of his children; for they are his hope, his joy, his crown of rejoicing, 1 Thess. ii. 19.

5. *It is certain that the beloved John, whose piety far exceeded that of most men, had many pure and exalted joys.* Among these we may notice—his union with Christ—his high and holy calling, as an apostle of our Lord—his fellowship with the church—his spirituality and heavenly-mindedness—reflections on his personal acquaintance with Jesus, and the distinguishing marks of his Master's love to him—and his prospects of a happy and glorious immortality. Inspired with these joys, and allowing that he had no other, he was happier far than the most elevated of those mortals whose only portion was in the present world; and in such a frame of mind as those joys produced, might look down on all the mighty sons of earth with pity and compassion.

6. *But he had no greater joy than to hear that his children walked in truth.* He does not say he had no equal to that, but he had none which was greater. But why did he rejoice so greatly in the consistent character and conduct of his children? The following reasons may be assigned:—

God was glorified in their fruit, John xv. 8 ;—*the truth was exalted and acknowledged* before men, Tit. i. 1 ;—*the ministry was honored*, 2 Thess. iii. 1 ;—they were *happy* in a consistent conduct, Rev. xxii. 14 ;—they were *useful* in the world, Rom. ii. 10 ; and John had the pleasing prospect of their being his *confidence* at the coming of the Lord, 1 John ii. 28. Baxter observes that “true ministers rejoice more for the welfare of men’s souls, than in their procuring wealth and worldly honors.”

7. *The joyous feelings of the holy apostle would carry him forward in his great work with increasing ardour.* The world, the devil, and sin, oppose every faithful minister ; but he fights the good fight, and gains the victory, 2 Tim. iv. 7. 8. Bonds and afflictions abide by him ; but he is not moved ; he rejoices in his work, and counts not his life dear unto him, that he may finish his course with joy, and the ministry which he has received of the Lord Jesus, Acts xx. 23, 24. Such was the experience of the apostle Paul, such was the experience of John the Divine, and may this be the happy experience of every christian minister.

8. *Happy are the people who are favoured with a minister, whose greatest joy is their prosperity in pure religion.* Their best interests lie near his heart ; he carefully teaches them the truth ; he constantly remembers them in his prayers ; he visits them in their afflictions ; he sets them a good example ; and watches over them in the Lord with constant care. Such ministers are worthy of double honor, 1 Tim. v. 17 ; and whatever treatment they meet with among men, they will be highly honored in the day of judgment.

CHRISTIANS REQUIRED TO CONTEND FOR THE FAITH.

Jude 3.—Beloved, when I gave all diligence to write unto you of the common salvation, it was needful for me to write unto you, and exhort you, that ye should earnestly contend for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints. (Sk.)

THIS epistle was written by Jude, “a servant of Jesus Christ,” in the gospel ministry, to them who were “sanctified,” or separated from an idolatrous world, “by God the Father, and preserved in Jesus Christ,” from dangerous errors and wicked practices ; and who were “called” to embrace the doctrines, engage in the duties, and share the privileges of genuine Christianity ; and he devoutly prays that mercy, peace, and love, might be multiplied unto them. They were beloved by him, as all true believers should be by Christian ministers ; and under the influence of Divine inspiration, he gave all diligence to write unto them on that salvation which is common to all who believe, whether they be Jews or Gentiles ; but found it particularly needful to exhort them to contend earnestly for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints ; because many seducing teachers had crept in among them unawares.

I. WHAT IS THAT FAITH WHICH WAS ONCE DELIVERED UNTO THE SAINTS ?

1. *It is not a set of mere notions and opinions, founded on human reason, and supported by powers of oratory.* The heathen philosophers were famous for speculative notions, but were strangers to the truth as it is in Jesus. They had vast stores of human learning, but were ignorant of the God who

gave them being: and all men, nowever learned, who are in a state of nature, are ignorant of their Maker; for "the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him; neither can he know them," 1 Cor. ii. 14.

2. *The faith of a Christian implies, either that act of his mind, by which he gives credence to revealed truth; or, by a usual metonymy, the objects of his faith, including all the doctrines of Christianity.* The credence which he gives is founded on satisfactory evidence. He has examined the *character* of Christ and his apostles, and finds they were worthy of credit; he has examined the *doctrines* which they taught, and finds them worthy of God; he has examined the miracles which they wrought in open day, and before multitudes of witnesses, as proofs of their mission from God, and finds them to be *real* and highly important facts; and he has examined the prophecies which they delivered, and finds them exact predictions of future events. On these and other important grounds, he gives full credit to all the truths which they taught. The principal doctrines which he believes may be summed up in a few articles: such as, the being and perfections of God, Matt. v. 48; the government of the world by divine providence, Matt. x. 29, 30; the original purity and happiness of man, Gen. i. 27; his awful apostacy from God, 1 John v. 19; the atonement of Jesus Christ, 1 John ii. 2; the influences of the Holy Spirit on the hearts of men, Gal. v. 22, 23; justification by faith, Rom. v. 1; the necessity of inward and outward holiness, 1 Thess. v. 23; a resurrection from the dead, John v. 28, 29; a day of judgment, Acts xvii. 31; and eternal rewards and punishments, Matt. xxv. 46.

3. *This faith was once delivered to the saints.* It was delivered in *part* by the Jewish prophets; but *fully* by Christ and his apostles, Heb. i. 1, ii. 3, 4. It was delivered to holy persons, not only to illuminate their own understandings, but that they might communicate it to others, and thereby enlighten the nations which were in darkness and in death, Matt. v. 15.

4. *Besides this faith or belief of truth, there is a living and working faith, which has been delivered by Christ and his apostles, as a term or condition of salvation.* This faith implies a *knowledge* of Jesus in his mediatorial undertakings; an humble *dependence* on him as our atoning sacrifice; and a receiving of him in all his sacred offices and characters, Mark xvi. 15; John i. 12; Rom. x. 10. Faith in the *doctrines* of Christianity precedes *saving* faith; but he who believes the truth, without being influenced by it both in heart and life, has only a dead faith, James ii. 26; while he whose faith is active and operative, is brought into spiritual life and divine love, Gal. ii. 20, v. 6; and thus faith purifies the heart, Acts xv. 9.

II. HOW SHOULD THE SAINTS CONTEND FOR FAITH?—

1. *The faith of a Christian is worth contending for, being of great value, and of vast importance to man.* It brings him out of darkness into light: teaches him the knowledge of himself and of God his Saviour: and opens to his view a blessed and glorious immortality, 2 Tim. i. 10. Without this faith we should be buried in gross ignorance, frightful superstitions, and destructive delusions.

2. *The Christian faith has many opposers, and we must prepare to meet them in the field of battle.* This faith is opposed by Jews, Infidels, Mohammedans, and Heathens. Let us defend it by sound arguments, drawn from the written word. This is our weapon, and when skilfully used, will either convince our enemies, or put them to flight. They will not easily yield to logic, metaphysics, or oratory; but the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God, will carry all before it, Eph. vi. 17

3. *Contend earnestly for the faith of the Lord Jesus Christ, which is placed in your hands as a sacred deposit, to be preserved in its purity.* Some who contend for the faith *ex officio*, neither seem to believe it themselves, nor to wish others to believe. To them the doctrines of the cross have no charms; they are lovers of filthy lucre, and would surrender the faith for wealth and honor. But when we consider that the present happiness of men, and their future prospects, depend on their receiving and holding fast the truth, we are awakened to a holy zeal, and contend for the faith with a sacred ardor.

4. *But though we contend with earnestness, let us carefully avoid carnal weapons and angry passions.* Mohammed contended for his faith with the sword; the Roman Catholics have contended for their faith by racks and tortures; but the real Christian, in a spirit of meekness, contends not with carnal weapons, but those which are mighty, 2 Cor. x. 4. He uses sound words and potent arguments, and is able "both to exhort and convince gainsayers," Tit. i. 9.

5. *Never contend merely for the sake of victory, but with a view to do good.* He who aims at nothing but victory, is proud and vain; and would undertake to defend either truth or error, for the sake of a triumph. The man of God has better motives and ends in all his contentions; he constantly aims at the good of men and the glory of God; and when these objects are not likely to be promoted, he retires and mourns in secret. The apostle Paul was set for the defence of the gospel, Phil. i. 17; and it is very observable, that when he was brought before kings and great men, his only object was to prove the truth, and win them over to the cause of Christ, Acts xxvi. 28, 29.

6. *Beware of little petty controversies about either nonessential things, or things beyond the reach of human intellect.* Many questions which have agitated the church in all ages, have been foolish and trifling; and others have been profoundly deep and unfathomable. When we contend for that which is important and within our reach, we keep in the line of duty; but when we engage in disputes on fanciful and deeply mysterious things, we miss our way, and injure the cause which we profess to support. Such were the vain janglings which the apostle Paul condemned, 1 Tim. i. 3—7.

To conclude:—

Let us be thankful to God for his holy word, which is an infallible rule both of *faith* and *practice*; let us believe what he has revealed, though we cannot in every instance understand the mysteries of our faith; let us seek no new doctrine, but carefully study that which has been delivered to the saints; let us arm our minds with *plain* and *solid* arguments, to defend this faith against the subtle and malicious attacks of infidels and heretics; let us bend all our force in support of *vital* truths; let us transmit our faith, in its purity and simplicity, to the rising generation; and, above all, let us contend for that faith which unites the soul to Christ, and which is, "the *substance* of things hoped for, and the evidence of things not seen," Heb. xi. 1.

FAMILY RELIGION.

Gen xviii. 19.—I know him, that he will command his children and his household after him, and they shall keep the way of the Lord, to do justice and judgment; that the Lord may bring upon Abraham, that which he hath spoken of him. (B.)

IN the context we have a lively picture of the hospitality, simplicity, benevolence, and liberality of the ancient patriarchs, ver. 1. This appearance of God to Abraham seems to have had in it more of freedom and familiarity, and less of grandeur and majesty, than those of which we have hitherto read, and, therefore, more resembled that great visit, which, in the fulness of time, the Son of God was to make to the world. God knew and approved his piety and integrity, and was assured he would employ his authority, as a father and a master, for the promotion of religion and justice, and would communicate the knowledge he acquired, for the benefit of those under his charge.

Let us consider,

I. THE LIGHT IN WHICH ABRAHAM APPEARS IN THIS PASSAGE; and how he was qualified for the duty here ascribed to him.

He appears,—A man of *knowledge*; not, perhaps, in the jargon of language, the refinements of sciences, the niceties of history, or the subtilties of speculation; but in matters of the greatest moment to his own present and everlasting salvation, and that of others, namely, in religion and morality, here termed the “way of the Lord,” “justice and judgment.” — — —

A man of *piety*. He not only understood the way of the Lord; but he loved, experienced, and practised it. Hence his concern and endeavor to impress it upon others. Without personal religion in the heads of families, we cannot expect they will sincerely and perseveringly endeavor to promote it in their children or servants. — — —

A man of *virtue*. Justice and judgment were as dear to him, and as much practised by him, as the “way of the Lord.” He did not make doing his duty to God, a reason for neglecting his duty to his neighbor; nor, what God had joined together did he put asunder. — — —

A man of *authority*. “He will command his children and his household after him.” Observe the respect and obedience he enforced, and his great influence over his family.

This was owing to his *station*. God had made him their head, and they had been taught to acknowledge and revere the appointment of God.

His *knowledge* and *wisdom*. — — —

His known and approved *piety*. They knew God was on his side, and that if they opposed him, God would resent it.

His consistent *virtue*. — — —

A man of *fidelity*. Whatever knowledge, piety, virtue, or authority he had, he faithfully employed for *his* glory, who entrusted him with them, and to the end intended,—the good of others, and especially of his own family.

A man of *diligence*. He appears evidently to have been laborious in this duty.

II. THE NATURE OF THIS DUTY; or his endeavors for the good of his family.

He not only prayed *with* and *before* his family, but interceded for them as a *priest*. This the ancient patriarchs and holy men of old did. They

were priests in their own houses. Job i. 5. So should every master of a christian family be. Indeed every private christian is a priest unto God. (Enlarge respecting praying with and for every member of our family.)

He was a *prophet* in his family. He instructed them; not in matters of mere speculation, nor doubtful disputation,—this were foolish and unprofitable,—but in matters of experimental and practical religion and virtue.

He taught them the “way of the Lord,” i. e. God’s way towards them, as a Creator, Preserver, Benefactor, and their way towards God, or piety, and godliness; the true knowledge, fear, love of God, obedience to his commands, patience under his dispensations, contentment in all estates, the time being short, deadness to the world and sin, and devotedness to God; and, in order to all this, repentance towards God, and faith in Christ. (Here show how the being and attributes of God may be demonstrated even to children from the works of creation, &c. the truth of the scriptures also, and of christianity, &c.)

He taught them *virtue*, “to do justice and judgment,—truth, justice, mercy, charity, flowing from the love of our neighbour, and the love of God. Children should be taught to consider all men as allied to each other, being creatures of one Creator, made of one blood, partaking of one nature, mortal, immortal, bought by the Redeemer, &c. Also, children should be early accustomed to sincerity, veracity, strict honesty, plain dealing, pity to those in distress, a forgiving spirit, a readiness to relieve those in want. In order to this, as well as to the health of their own bodies, and the peace of their own minds, they should be taught temperance, chastity, self-denial, &c.—

Abraham taught his family, lastly, not barely to know these things, but to do them.

Now upon whom must this be inculcated?—Upon *children*. Deut. iv. 9. If our children be the Lord’s they must be educated for him. If they wear his livery, and be called by his name, they must do his work. What hypocrisy is it to dedicate our children to God in baptism, and promise they shall “renounce the devil and all his works, the vain pomp and glory of the world, with all covetous desires of the same, and the carnal desires of the flesh, so that they shall not follow, nor be led by them,” and afterwards to take no care that they may fulfil it!—Upon *servants*. Abraham had born in his house, three hundred and eighteen servants, Gen. xiv. 14, *trained*, or, as the Hebrew word means, *catechized*. Our servants are entrusted to our care, and should be taught and directed by us, while in our family.

But how must our children and servants be instructed? Deut. vi. 6. &c. By conversation, advice, exhortation, reading, hearing, catechizing, &c. and especially teaching them to “know the scriptures.” 2 Tim. iii. 15. Further,

He was a *king* in his house, and used authority.—He not only recommended these things, and advised, and set before them the advantages on the one hand, and the miseries on the other, of the conduct which they might pursue, but he solemnly enjoined and insisted on these things, on pain of incurring his displeasure, as well as that of God. He not only used *doctrine*, but *discipline*, Eph. vi. 4. He not only informed the understanding of his children and domestics, as it might gradually open, by doctrine, and reminded and admonished them, but he persuaded, turned, and subdued the will to God and man, as far as possible, by discipline, rewards, punishments, or corrections, especially with regard to his children.

III. HOW PLEASING IT WAS TO GOD, and the blessed consequences thereof to Abraham and his family.

Observe—The reason why God would hide nothing from Abraham. “For I know him,” &c. Abraham was communicative of his knowledge, and improved it to the good of those under his care, and therefore God resolved to make communications to him.

The way to the accomplishment of God’s promises; “That the Lord may bring upon Abraham that which he hath spoken of him.”

Family blessings arise from family religion;—Temperance, frugality, industry, discretion.

Peace, quietness, love, harmony.

The favour, protection, care of God, his direction and aid.

All necessities. Psalm xxxvii. 25. Matt. vi. 33.

Prosperity, as far as will be for good for us and our families.

Our prayers are heard.

Afflictions are sanctified to us, and we are supported under them.

We make a comfortable progress together in the ways of God, and receive many spiritual blessings.

We shall meet in his presence and kingdom hereafter, and spend an eternity together.

The sad reverse when this course is not taken.

Hence arise family curses—Intemperance, prodigality, idleness, imprudence.

Strife, contention, hatred, disturbance.

The displeasure of God, &c. and his curse on all we do.

Not even necessities, perhaps, but beggary and want

Nothing prospers.

Our prayers are rejected.

We are abandoned of God in our afflictions, and hardened by them.

We go forward miserably in the ways of the Devil.

We shall meet at the left hand of the Judge in the great day, and in hell, amidst everlasting strife and misery.

CONFESSING CHRIST BEFORE MEN.

Matt. x. 32.—Whosoever, therefore, shall confess me before men, him will I confess also before my Father which is in heaven. (Sk.)

“ALL that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution.” This apostolic maxim has been illustrated and established by the records of the Christian history in all ages. The carnal mind being “enmity against God” is decidedly hostile to the holy constitution and renovating designs of the gospel. Hence the annals of the church have been stained with the blood of martyrs, who with pious magnanimity have preferred immolation on the altar of bigotry, rather than violate the sacred rights of conscience. Of this course of suffering and death, Jesus Christ most fully apprized his followers, when he planted Christianity in the earth, Matt. x. 16—22. At the same time furnishing them with the most ample encouragement, steadily to persevere in the path of duty which lay before them; by referring to his own reproach and suffering, ver. 24, 25:—to the circumscribed extent of their enemies’ malevolent influence, ver. 28;—to the minute care of Divine

providence, ver. 29—31;—to the awful consequence of timidity and cowardice, ver. 33, 39;—and to the honorable and highly advantageous result of Christian magnanimity. The last description of encouragement is contained in the passage before us, in discussing which, we shall have to consider,

I. THE NATURE OF THAT CONFESSION WHICH CHRISTIANITY REQUIRES.

II. THE HONORABLE DISTINCTION WITH WHICH A STEADY COURSE OF CHRISTIAN FORTITUDE WILL BE CROWNED.

I. THE NATURE OF THAT CONFESSION WHICH CHRISTIANITY REQUIRES.

This interesting confession includes various considerations, viz.

1. *An open avowal of the person and Messiahship of Christ.* The sacred Scriptures represent Jesus Christ as that "Word" which "was in the beginning with God," and which "was God;" the "Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end, the first and the last;" and yet was "made flesh," and dwelling among the inhabitants of the earth, for the purpose of human redemption. Therefore, those who scripturally "confess Christ before men," unequivocally acknowledge his "eternal power and Godhead," and yet gratefully consider the mysterious union of the Divine nature with the human, as a luminous display of the love of God to fallen man; and as the divinely appointed means of rescuing him from everlasting perdition. And this they are not ashamed publicly to avow and support; in opposition to the presuming pride of human reason, which absurdly affects to reject and deny that which it cannot comprehend, John i. 1—3, 14, x. 30, xiv. 11; Col. i. 16, 17; John iii. 16; Phil. ii. 5—8. But as devils have thus confessed Christ, saying, "We know thee who thou art, the Holy One of God," it is necessary to proceed farther, and notice.

2. *A conscientious adherence to the fundamental doctrines of Christianity.* In every theory which the human mind is capable of embracing, there are certain grand principles which are individually essential to the existence and consistency of the whole. So the Christian character, while it has for its ground-work, a conscientious avowal of the person and messiahship of Christ, includes in its superstructure, a sincere confession of the deep-rooted depravity of the human heart, and its consequent moral imbecility, Gen. iii. 8—19; Jer. xvii. 9, xiii. 23; 2 Cor. iii. 5;—of the atonement and mediation of Christ, as the only legitimate medium of access to God, Isa. liii. 4, 5; 1 Pet. ii. 24; Rom. v. 11; Heb. vii. 24, 25; Rom. v. 1, 2;—of the reality of the Holy Spirit's influence, as a principle of spiritual light, renovation, life, and holiness, Eph. i. 17, 18, ii. 1; Rom. xv. 13; Ezek. xxxvi. 25;—of the justification of the penitent sinner through faith in our Lord Jesus Christ, John iii. 16—18; Rom. iii. 24—27, iv. 2—8; Gal. ii. 16; iii. 6—12;—and of holiness of heart and life, as the evidence of faith, and a meetness for the felicities of the heavenly world, 1 Cor. vi. 11; 1 Pet. i. 13—16; 1 Thess. iii. 13; Heb. xii. 10, 14; Col. i. 12.

3. *A declaration of the benefits received.* The true believer in the Lord Jesus Christ, having been made the partaker of innumerable blessings at the hands of his Divine Master, gratefully acknowledges his obligations, and with pious solicitude inquires, "What shall I render unto the Lord for all his benefits?" And he evinces his gratitude to God, by *aspirations of praise*;—by *carefully guarding the good which he has received*;—by *emulating more exalted enjoyments*;—and by *publishing, for the good of others, what God has done for him*. Ps. xxxiv. 1, 2; 1 Cor. xv. 57; Phil. iii. 8—16; Ps. lxxvi. 16; Rom. x. 10; Acts xxiv. xxvi.

4. *Zealously supporting the cause of Christian truth.* No man can properly "confess Christ before men," without feeling a lively concern for

the promotion of the gospel in the earth. This pious zeal manifests itself, *by owning, adhering to, and kindly aiding the followers of Christ*, John xiii. 35;—*by administering affectionate reproof to the ungodly*, Lev. xix. 17; Eph. v. 11;—*by exhibiting an example of Christian excellence to the world*, Matt. v. 13—16;—*by contributing pecuniary support*, Prov. iii. 9; Luke viii. 3;—*and by submitting to reproach and suffering*, when circumstances require it, Acts vii. 54—60, xx. 24, xxi. 13; 2 Cor. xii. 23—33.

II. THE HONORABLE DISTINCTION WITH WHICH A STEADY COURSE OF CHRISTIAN FORTITUDE WILL BE CROWNED. “Him will I confess also before my Father which is in heaven.” Although man is by nature a rebel against the Majesty of heaven; yet the subject of vital godliness is owned, and highly distinguished by his God, even whilst journeying down the vale of life; by the ample supplies which are furnished; the invulnerable defence with which he is favored; the divine enjoyments of which he is the partaker; and the animating hope with which he is inspired. But the blessed Redeemer doubtless refers to that solemn period, when,

“The Judge, descending, thunders from afar,
And all mankind are summon’d to his bar;”

that tremendous “day when God shall judge the secrets of men by Jesus Christ,” “who will render unto every man according to his deeds.” At that awful period of final decision, the Redeemer “will confess” his followers before assembled worlds, by

1. *An act of separation.* In the present condition of man, the Christian has to maintain a frequent intercourse with that class of his fellow creatures, who are under the influence of sinful habits and immoral dispositions; and this necessary intermixture is sometimes productive of painful sensations, and moral danger. Even in the silent grave the dust of the righteous and the wicked, in an intermixed state, rests till the morning of the general judgment, “when the dead shall be raised,” and an eternal separation take place between “those who serve God, and those who serve him not,” Matt. xxv. 31—33; Luke xvi. 26.

2. *By an approving plaudit.* The Lord Jesus Christ, in the character of Judge, will publicly *own the persons*, and *approve the conduct* of those, who have boldly asserted his right, and suffered in his cause. Before angels, devils, and men, he will bear testimony to their faithfulness, and introduce them to those regions of unalloyed delight, where the “wicked cease from troubling, and the weary be at rest,” Matt. xxv. 23, 34—40.

3. *By making them partakers of his glory.* Such is the amazing condescension of the “Captain of our salvation,” that although it is through strength divine, that the Christian overcomes his enemies; perseveres in the path of righteousness; and achieves a final conquest; yet he addresses him, and acts towards him, as though the whole were effected solely by unaided human energy. He does not remind him of his dependence, and his obligations; but makes him the partaker of his honors, his throne, and his felicity. And this glory is *inviolable, eternal*, and yet *progressive*, John xiv. 1, 2, 3; Matt. xxv. 46; Rev. iii. 5, 21, v. 10.

From this subject we learn,

1. That the human heart is, by nature, decidedly hostile to the spirit of the gospel.

2. That an entire change is essential to a scriptural confession of Christ.

3. That the Christian cannot ultimately be a loser by suffering for righteousness’ sake

CHRISTIAN HOPE.

Romans v. 5.—And hope maketh not ashamed ; because the love of God is shed abroad in your hearts by the Holy Ghost which is given unto us. (Sk.)

THE uniformity of christian experience, and its harmony with the sacred scriptures, furnish the most powerful arguments in opposition to the subtle sophisms of infidelity. Though the conditions of men widely differ, yet all those who are under the influence of that “faith which worketh by love,” bear the same divine “image and superscription;” and though the several denominations of christians cannot harmonize on some minor points of theory, modes of worship, and forms of church government; yet they all find a central point at which they can meet, in the union of that christian experience described by the apostle in the verses preceding the text. In the passage before us, and its interesting context, the true believer recognises the foundation of his experience, in the atonement and resurrection of Christ, chap. iv. 25; the means of its existence and progress in that faith which is “of the operation of God,” chap. v. 1, 2; its interesting gradation, ver. 3, 4; and its pleasing influence. Let us proceed to consider,

I. THE NATURE OF CHRISTIAN HOPE.

II. THE EFFECT WHICH IT PRODUCES.

III. THE REASON WHICH IT ASSIGNS.

In giving a general idea of hope, we may consider it as implying the *approbation* of its object; either on account of its real or imaginary excellence;—the *possibility* of possessing that object;—the *desire* of attainment; and a *pleasurable sensation of mind*, commensurate with our estimate of the object, and our prospect of possessing it. In confining our attention to christian hope, it will be necessary to consider,

I. *The magnificence of its object.* The hope of the christian is an object infinitely superior to every thing of an earthly kind; it quits terrestrial scenes; it mounts on high; approaches the throne of the Eternal; and fixes on the “glory of God” as its object. The term “glory” is sometimes associated with *conquest*, and in this sense it is the distinguished object of the believer’s hope. That adorable Being, whose perfections he emulates is the universal conqueror; and through him the christian hopes to overcome all opposition, triumph over every enemy, and seize the victor’s palm in the regions of immortality, Rom. viii. 73; 1 Cor. xv. 57. “Glory” is sometimes descriptive of *grandeur*, and such are the exalted expectations of the christian, that he hopes to participate in the grandeur of his triumphant Redeemer, and vie with the sun when beaming forth in all his noon tide refulgence, Dan. xii. 2, 3; Matt. xiii. 43; Rev. iii. 21. But by “the glory of God,” the believer more generally understands the participation of *celestial felicity*; the eternal enjoyment of the unveiled glories of the Deity; comprehending the entire exclusion of every species of evil, the perfections of society, and the consummation of happiness, Matt. xxv. 34; 46; 1 Pet. i. 3, 4. But as ungodly men sometimes profess to have hopes of heaven, it is of considerable importance that we attend to,

2. *The purity of its motive.* The hope of the righteous is influenced by a motive widely different from, and superior to, that which excites the feeble and groundless expectation of the sinner. Whilst the wicked hope to go to heaven merely that they may escape that punishment which is the just award of their rebellious conduct; the righteous have the same object in view, and hope to attain it from principles of *love to God, attachment to his*

people, delight in holiness, and an ardent desire to enjoy the presence of Jehovah, 2 Cor. v. 1—4; Phil. i. 23.

3. *The solidity of its basis.* The hope of the christian is not founded on a supposed goodness of heart, nor on a comparative superiority of character, nor yet on the mercy of God simply considered, for he remembers the righteous claims of divine justice; and therefore the basis of his hope is, the atonement of Christ, and a lively interest in, and union with the "true vine." John xv. 4, 5; Rom. v. 1, 2, viii. 1—9; Gal. ii. 20.

II. THE EFFECT WHICH IT PRODUCES:—"maketh not ashamed." Although every true believer in the Lord Jesus Christ is ashamed of his former sinful practices, of his late ungodly associates, and of every thing inconsistent with the holy constitution of the gospel; yet he is "not ashamed,"

1. *Of Jesus Christ and his truth.* He humbly acknowledges his need of him as an all-sufficient and a present Saviour; with holy gratitude and pious exultation he confesses his interest in his dependence upon, and his obligation unto him. He is zealous for the extension of christian truth in earth, and in various ways labours to advance his Master's interests among men, Matt. x. 32; Rom. i. 16; Gal. vi. 14; 1 Tim. i. 15, 16.

2. *Of the reproach which is connected with christianity.* Suffering and reproach have been connected with the progress of christian truth in all ages, and the records of the christian church have been stained with the tears and blood of the magnanimous soldiers of the cross, who, fearless of all consequences, have steadily avowed their attachment to their divine Master. Yea, they have rejoiced in having been permitted to participate in the sufferings of their Lord, Acts vii. 54—60, xx. 24, xxi. 13; Heb. xi. 35—40.

3. *Of his christian brethren.* The genuine follower of the Lord Jesus Christ, considers all who bear the image of his Master, however poor and afflicted they may be, as members of his heavenly Father's family, fellow heirs of the same eternal inheritance, and partakers of like precious faith with himself. He acknowledges them by acts of social intercourse, by participating in their sorrows, and by administering to their necessities, John xiii. 34, 35; Rom. xv. 1, 2; 1 John iv. 11, 12, 20, 21.

4. *Of pious exertion in the cause of Christ.* This the christian considers to be a duty incumbent upon him, and for the purpose of aiding this cause, he prudently declares what God has done for him; administers affection, admonition, and reproof to his fellow creatures; and engages in the regular ordinances of christianity according to his ability; crowning the whole with incessant prayer to God for the prosperity of Zion, Psal. lxvi. 16, cxxii. 6; 1 Cor. ix. 19—22.

III. THE REASON WHICH IT ASSIGNS:—"Because the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts," &c. The religion of the gospel is a reasonable thing, and all its effects are strictly consistent with that divine source from which they proceed, and its highly honored subjects are "able to give a reason of the hope that is in them."

1. *The strength of its evidence.* The residence of the Holy Spirit in the breast of the christian, furnishes him with an indubitable evidence of the heavenly origin and divine reality of his religion. The skeptic may cavil, and the sneering infidel may object, but the

"Christian dwells, like Uriel, in the sun
Meridian evidence puts doubt to flight,
And ardent hope anticipates the skies."

The Spirit of love dwelling in his heart, bears ample testimony to his presence there, Rom. viii. 14—17; 2 Cor. vi. 16; Gal. iv. 6. And this internal conviction is accompanied by external operations of corresponding character, as *spirituality of temper and disposition; obedience to the divine commandments; resignation to the divine will; and zeal for the divine glory*, Gal. v. 22—24; 1 John iv. 13—21.

2. *The fulness of that enjoyment with which it is connected.* “The love of God” is pleasingly adapted to the intense cravings of an immortal spirit; and when this love “is shed abroad in the heart,” it produces happiness the most pure, the most satisfactory, and the most permanent. The burden of native guilt is removed, peace is experienced, joy fills the heart, and the expanding soul has large anticipations of celestial felicity, “rejoicing in hope of the glory of God,” Romans v. 11, xiv. 17; 2 Tim. iv. 6—8.

This subject tends,

1. To promote inquiry respecting our interest in this hope.
2. To elicit sentiments of gratitude from those who possess it.
3. To stimulate to diligence those who are “without hope.”

WATCHFULNESS, A PREPARATION FOR THE COMING OF CHRIST.

Mark xiii. 35, 36.—Watch ye therefore: for ye know not when the master of the house cometh, at even, or at midnight, or at the cock crowing, or in the morning; lest coming suddenly he find you sleeping. (B.)

I name these words as the subject of a discourse, at this time, because I think nothing happens by chance; that the superintending providence of God is over all things, especially over the death of mankind, and that in a signal manner, when any individuals are suddenly and unexpectedly removed from this world. I think, likewise, that such dispensations are peculiar calls and warnings to the living to “prepare to meet their God;” and that it is the duty of those who “watch for souls,” to endeavor to improve such events, and thus, in a certain sense, to be “workers together with God.”

The Author, (having here mentioned several instances of sudden death, which had recently occurred,) then proceeds to consider,

I. WHAT WE ARE TO UNDERSTAND BY THE COMING OF THE MASTER OF THE HOUSE.

By “the master of the house,” here, is meant Christ, as it is also in Luke xiii. 25. The world in general, and the visible Church in particular, and especially the spiritual part of it, are his house. Eph. i. 20—25; Heb. iii. 3—6.

His coming is represented in Scripture in different lights, and for different purposes.

In this chapter of Mark, and in the 24th chapter of Matthew, and the 21st of St. Luke, he is represented as coming to judge and punish the Jewish nation, his visible church of old, or his house, for rejecting him. Deut. xviii. 19, comp. with Acts iii. 23; Heb. xii. 15.

In other places he is represented as coming to judge all mankind at the last day. Ver. 24, 26; 2 Pet. iii. 3—12.

He is said to come. when he visits in a peculiar way, whether in judg-

ment or mercy, any nation, or church, or any particular member of it. Rev. ii. 5, 16; iii. 3.

He comes to each of us at death. Rev. i. 18; ii. 25; iii. 11.

It is this last coming of Christ to which I would especially call your attention. For it is of the greatest importance to us, since—It will separate us from all below, from our occupations, enjoyments, possessions, families, relations, and friends, and even from our own bodies.—It will finish our state of trial, and determine our condition for ever; for, you know, we are here on our trial for eternity.—It will bring us into the unseen and eternal world, a new, untried, unknown state.—It will place us in the presence of God, that we may receive his smile or frown, may enjoy the effects of his favor and friendship, and communications of bliss from him, or feel the effects of his wrath, and find him to be a consuming fire.—It will make a most astonishing change in our circumstances.—It often comes suddenly, and gives no warning.—

II. WHAT IS THAT WATCHFULNESS WHICH IS RECOMMENDED AS A PREPARATION FOR HIS COMING.

It implies life, spiritual life, in opposition to that sleep of death which is mentioned, Eph. v. 14; which text compare with Eph. ii. 1.—

It implies a lively sense of the reality and importance of spiritual and eternal things, such as persons awake have of temporal things, the seeing, feeling, tasting them, so to speak, in opposition to that insensibility about them, which is implied in spiritual sleep.

It implies a thoughtfulness, care, and concern about them, in opposition to that thoughtlessness and unconcern about them, which is natural to us.—

It implies a sense of our danger from our enemies, visible and invisible; from the Devil, the world, persons and things, the flesh, our own hearts, and the standing on our guard, in opposition to security of mind, and foolish peace.—

It implies activity, and the vigorous exercise of every grace and virtue, as repentance, faith, hope, love, patience, &c., in opposition to indolence and sloth.—

III. THE VAST IMPORTANCE OF THIS WATCHFULNESS, as a preparation for every dispensation of divine Providence, and especially for death.

The spiritual life, and lively sense of the things of God, which are comprehended in this watchfulness, form a preparation for every event of Providence, as for temporal losses or gains, honor or dishonor, sickness, or health, &c.—We are thus armed against every enemy and assault.—We are fitted for every duty to God, our neighbor, and ourselves.—We are also in this way prepared for death.—

Does death separate us from all below? We are prepared to be thus separated, being dead to the world, and our wills being resigned to the will of God. Does it terminate our state of trial? We are prepared to have it terminated. Does it bring us into the invisible world? We are ready for that world; our thoughts and affections have gone before us, and we have made provision, and laid up treasure there. Does it bring us into the presence of God? The watchful are prepared for his presence, having by grace, through faith, ensured his favor, his friendship, his image, an acquaintance and fellowship with him. Does it make an astonishing change in our circumstances? The watchful are prepared for that change, having acquired a meetness for, and an earnest of heaven in their hearts. Does it often come sud-

denly, and give no warning? The watchful are habitually expecting it, and therefore are not surprised by its arrival. — —

But very different is the case with the unwatchful.—Suppose them, first, *unconverted* persons. If awakened on the borders of the grave, they are thrown into the greatest confusion and dismay; they are carried away from all those sensual possessions and enjoyments on which they once doted; their state of trial is ended, and they can never afterwards be quickened to spiritual life and renewed in holiness; they awake into a life worse than dying.—Suppose them *righteous*. By their improvident slumbering they darken their evidences, and render their state uncomfortable; they cannot expect any peculiar support or consolation at a dying hour, or in the time of affliction; they are often left to wrestle with sore temptation; they make dismal work for bitter repentance on a sick and death bed; they have the misery of reflecting that they have omitted many duties to God and man which now can never be performed, have not attained those degrees of holiness they might have attained, and although they do not finally perish, they have deprived themselves of the reward they might have enjoyed. As they bring little glory to God in life, so they do him no honor in their death, and leave little comfort to their friends concerning them. Perhaps they leave them in doubt whether they are saved or lost.

IV. HOW WE MAY BE ENABLED TO TAKE THIS ADVICE, AND TO “WATCH;” and what are the means leading to that end.

We must not presume on a long life, which is a most dangerous temptation, and an abundant source of unwatchfulness; but we must set before us, and have always in view, the shortness and uncertainty of the present life, and the certainty, and nearness of death.—We must remember, that unless we were lords of our own lives, and could appoint the time of our death, we can never be exempt from the duty of a wakeful and active attention to our spiritual and eternal interests.—Those whose constitutions are peculiarly feeble, or whose circumstances or employments expose them to peculiar danger, or who are arrived at old age, should consider themselves as being under especial obligations to be watchful.—We must be particularly on our guard against our own nature, and every person and thing around us, which tends to lull us asleep, and against sensuality and worldly cares. Luke xxi. 34.—We must remember that thousands are found sleeping, even thousands of professors, at the coming of their Lord.—We must pray much; a duty frequently inculcated in connection with watchfulness. Ver. 33; Luke xxi. 36; Eph. vi. 18.— —

HOLY ARDOR.

Psalm lxi. 8.—My soul followeth hard after thee. (Sk.)

To mankind in general this passage must be quite unintelligible. “God is not in all their thoughts, consequently they neither desire nor seek him. They might use the text with great propriety to express their attachment to the world, and its various objects—“Riches, honors, power, pleasures, our souls follow hard after you.” It is only the christian that can truly adopt this language as his own. But even among professing christians too many

are strangers to such sacred fervours—many feel them but too seldom—and few, if any, appreciate them aright. It will therefore be proper.

I. TO DESCRIBE THIS STATE OF EXPERIENCE. It implies,

1. *A renunciation of the world.* This results from a conviction of its vanity. No man can follow God and the world at once, Matt. vi. 24; Luke xvi. 13; 1 John ii. 15. But we never renounce the world till we feel its vanity, and sensibly apprehend the fallacy of its *pretensions*—the unsatisfying nature of its *enjoyments*—the uncertainty and shortness of its *tenure*. In renouncing the world, however, we do not neglect its lawful concerns—shun human society—or despise the blessings of Providence. But we withdraw all *dependence* upon it—all *improper detachment* to it—and all *anxious cares* concerning it.

2. *A deliberate choice of God*, as the only adequate good of the soul. The soul must have some supreme object—The creature renounced, it can only cleave to the Creator, whom it now views as the sovereign Good, *suitable* to its nature—*adequate* to its wants—*permanent and secure* in possession.

3. *A vehement and intense desire after him.* This is the sense of the text. Perhaps the Psalmist alludes to a thirsty hart seeking the cooling brook, ver. 1; Psa. xliii. 1. The soul longs ardently to *know* God in Christ more explicitly—to be more perfectly *conformed to his image*—to have more *intimate communion* with him, and finally to *enjoy him* in all his plenitude for ever.

4. *The exercise of faith and hope.* God can only be known by faith—and unless we believe he is to be found, we shall never seek after him, Heb. xi. 2. The soul *apprehends* him as its God in Christ, and fully *anticipates* all the enjoyments which it desires. And in this exercise of faith and hope there is *present delight*.—The soul divinely sustained (“thy right hand upholdeth me”) cheerfully and eagerly follows after God in the path of duty—in prayer, hearing, and all his ordinances. We are now led,

II. TO INVESTIGATE THE REASONS WHY IT IS SO RARE.

It is obvious few christians enjoy this experience; at least it is only *occasionally*, and not *generally*, that their hearts are in this state. The principal causes of their languor are,

1. *Inattention to the state of their own hearts.* They are not recollected;—they do not examine themselves closely. Hence they are ignorant of their real condition, and do not keenly feel their wants.—But unless we are deeply sensible of our need of God, we shall never follow hard after him.

2. *Permitting the objects of sense to make too deep impressions.* These naturally tend to blunt the edge of holy desire, and to divide and weaken the soul. Whatever convictions may have been received of the vanity of the world, it will again obtain the ascendancy without much watchfulness and firm resistance.

3. *Neglect of the instituted means.* This indeed is often the *effect* of losing spiritual ardor. But it is more frequently the *cause*. When we imagine that the holy flame will burn without the aid of additional fuel, and without fanning it by frequent approaches to God, we fall in to a dangerous, and too often fatal snare.

4. *The indulgence of wrong dispositions, &c.* Unbelief, pride, vain curiosity, levity, censoriousness, uncharitable or useless conversation, &c. all these, like water, tend to damp and weaken, if not wholly to extinguish the desire for God

These are the principal reasons why David's experience is now so rarely enjoyed. But surely if christians knew how to value this state aright, they would never permit these causes so frequently to deprive them of it. In order to induce them to resist these hinderances, and to cultivate this state of soul, let us proceed,

III. TO REPRESENT IT AS THE MOST DESIRABLE EXPERIENCE. Innumerable are the advantages which result from it. We can only name a few.

1. *It is the best security against the allurements and troubles of the world.* A heart earnestly pursuing God has no leisure to gaze on the seductive charms of temporal good, and no disposition to pierce itself with the thorns of worldly solicitude. Comparative indifference to all but God, disarms both pleasure and pain of their power to injure, while the soul, free and disentangled, rapidly moves on in her heavenly course.

2. *It renders every duty delightful.* In this state nothing is done through custom, formality, or any other inferior motive—but every duty is performed with the highest views. God in Christ is aimed at in all—and oh! how sweet is prayer or praise, reading or hearing, meditation or christian conversation, or even the commonest affairs of life, when we thus do all “in the name of our Lord Jesus,” &c. Col. iii. 17.

3. *It prepares us for the largest communication.* We always receive from God what we earnestly and faithfully seek from him, Luke ii. 9, 10. In proportion, therefore, as our souls are enlarged by holy desire, humble faith, and earnest expectations, will be the divine communications unto them. By this holy fervor the soul throws itself open to receive all the fulness of God, the shoreless, fathomless ocean of good.

4. *It advances our sanctification, and consequently qualifies us for heaven.* Detaching us from the creature, fixing us upon the Creator, leading us to communion and fellowship with him, we naturally imbibe more and more of *his Spirit*, become more and more transformed into *his likeness*—All sin vanishes from his powerful presence—pure universal love occupies our whole hearts, and thus we become meet for our inheritance among the saints in light.

Let us conclude by addressing,

1. Those whose hearts are wholly set upon the world. You cleave to visible objects, and entirely neglect your Maker, Benefactor, and Redeemer—your Sovereign, Lawgiver, and Judge. Oh consider—*the excess of your folly*—you prefer shadows to realities, vexation of spirit to peace of mind—misery to bliss. *The baseness of your ingratitude*—you reject your only friend, and side with his enemies. *The enormity of your guilt*—you idolize the creature, and pour contempt upon the Creator.—*The imminence of your danger*—you are exposed to the fierceness of the divine displeasure, to all the torments of hell, Jer. xvii. 5; John iii. 31.

2. Lukewarm and unstable professors—you are if possible more culpable than the former—Consider how inconsistent your character is with your obligations—your engagements—your profession—and your interest.

3. Ardent spiritually-minded christians—go forward—fear not the imputation of enthusiasm—fear no disappointment. Believe the promise—cherish the most sanguine hopes—Delight yourselves in the Lord, and he shall give you the desires of your hearts, Matt. v. 6; Rev. xxi. 6.

THE POOR AND CONTRITE THE OBJECTS OF GOD'S FAVOR.

Isai. lxvi. 2.—To this man will I look, even to him that is poor and of a contrite spirit and trembleth at my word. (S. S.)

It often happens that accidental distinctions serve men as grounds of confidence towards God—

Many found their hopes on no better basis than Micah did—Judg. xvii. 13.

The Jews in particular thought themselves assured of the divine favor because of God's residence in their temple*—

But God shews them the folly of their notions†—

And declares the character of those, who alone shall be considered by him with any favorable regard.

I. WHO ARE THE OBJECTS OF THE DIVINE FAVOR?

Men choose for their companions the rich and gay—

But those, whom God regards, are of a very different character—

1. They *feel themselves destitute of all good.*

It is not temporal, but spiritual poverty, that distinguishes God's people—

They have discovered their total want of spiritual *wisdom*—Prov. xxx. 2, 3.

They are constrained to acknowledge that they have no *righteousness* of their own—Isai. lxiv. 6.

And that they are “without *strength*” for obedience—Rom. v. 6. 2 Cor. iii. 5.

They unfeignedly adopt the language of St. Paul—Rom. vii. 18.

Nor do they hope for mercy but as the *free gift* of God‡—

2. They *bewail the many evils they have committed.*

They have been made to see that sin is hateful to God—

And they have felt the bitterness of it in their own consciences—

They know experimentally the sensations of David—Ps. xxxviii. 4, 6, 8.

They loathe themselves for all their abominations—Ezek. xxxvi. 31.

Nor are their convictions merely occasional or transient—

They are *habitually* of a tender and “contrite spirit”—

3. They *pay a reverential regard to every word of God.*

They dare not say like the idolatrous Jews—Jer. xlv. 16.

They rather resemble the man after God's own heart—Ps. cxix. 161.

If the word be preached, they “receive it as the word, not of man, but of God”—

They hear the *threatenings* like the meek Josiah—2 Chron. xxxiv. 19, 27.

They attend to the *promises* with an eager desire to embrace them—

To every *precept* they listen with an obedient ear.¶—

* Hence that common boast among them, Jer. vii. 4.

† Ver. 1, 2. The import of which is, How can you think that I, an infinite Being, who myself created those things of which you boast, can be allured by an earthly structure to continue my presence among you, if you persist in your evil ways?

‡ They say not, like the servant, Matt. xviii. 26. but desire to experience the clemency shown to insolvent debtors, Luke vii. 42.

¶ Luke Cor nelius, Acts x. 33. and Paul, Acts xxii. 10. yea, the angels in heaven, Ps. ciii. 20.

These, though generally considered by the world as weak and *superstitious*, are not overlooked by the Supreme Being.

II. THE PECULIAR REGARD WHICH GOD SHEWS THEM.

The "eyes of God are in every place beholding the evil and the good"—But he "looks to" *these*, in a far different manner from *others*—

This distinguishing favor implies,

1. Approbation of them.

From the proud and self-sufficient, God turns his face—James iv. 6.

But he "despises not the broken and contrite in heart"—Ps. li. 17.

Though so exalted in himself, he will not disdain to notice them—

His approbation of such characters stands recorded for ever—Luke xviii.

13, 14.

His reception of the prodigal is an eternal monument of the regard he will shew to *every* repenting sinner—

2. Care over them.

Wherever they go, his eye is upon them for good—2 Chron. xvi. 9.

He watches them in order to deliver them from danger—Ps. xii. 5.

He watches them in order to comfort them in trouble—Ps. cxlvii. 3.

He watches them in order to relieve them in want—Isai. xli. 17, 18.

He watches them in order to exalt them to happiness and honor—1 Sam

ii. 8.

3. Delight in them.

There are none on earth so pleasing to God as brokenhearted sinners—

Their sighs and groans are as music in his ears—Ps. cii. 19, 20.

Their tears he treasures up in his vial—Ps. lvi. 8.

He dwells with them as his dearest friends—Isai. lvii. 15.

He rejoices over them as a people in whom he greatly delights—Zeph.

iii. 12, 17.

He saves them *here* by the unceasing exercise of his power—Ps. xxxiv.

15. 18.

And reserves for them *hereafter* an inheritance in heaven—Matt. v. 3.

Nor shall the fewness of such characters render them at all less the objects of God's regard.

It must be acknowledged that they are but few—

But if there were only *one* in the whole world, God would find him out*—

Not all the splendor of heaven, nor all the acclamations of angels, should for a moment divert God's attention from him—

Though he were despised by all the human race, yet should he be amiable in the eyes of his Maker—

Nor should he want any thing in time or eternity—

Never shall that declaration in any instance be falsified—Ps cxxxviii. 6.

INFER,

1. How should we admire the condescension of God!

If we view only the material world we may well stand astonished that God should regard such an insignificant creature as man—Ps. viii. 3, 4.

But, if we contemplate the majesty of God, we cannot but exclaim with Solomon—1 Kings viii. 27.

Let then the declaration in the text lead our thoughts up to God—

Let us adore him for so clearly describing the objects of his favor—

And let us express our admiration in the words of David—Ps. cxv. 5—8.

*"To this man, &c. even to him, &c."

2. How should we desire to attain the character that is pleasing to God!

The poor and contrite are *exclusively* beloved of God—

If he look on others, it is only as he did on the Egyptians, Exod. xiv.

24, 25.

And how dreadful must it be to have *such* an enemy!—

But how delightful to have an *almighty, omnipresent* guardian!—

Above all, how awful must it be to have *him turn his face from us* in the day of Judgment!—

Let us then endeavor to humble ourselves before God—Isai. ii. 11.

And rest assured that the promised mercy shall in due time be fulfilled to us—James iv. 10.

THE REWARD OF CHRIST'S FOLLOWERS.

Matt. xix. 27.—Then answered Peter and said unto him, Behold, we have forsaken all, and followed thee; what shall we have therefore? (Sk.)

WHATEVER enterprize we engage in, it is equally rational and just duly to consider the general merits of its character and the probable results of its issue. This is more especially the case when we embark in any cause which is likely to involve the most interesting and important consequences. Now this is unquestionably the character of religion, which is the one thing needful to every human being. In making choice therefore of this momentous subject, we should “first count the cost,” and then willingly renounce every thing which is incompatible with its possession, or it is impossible to realize its personal benefits. This is evidently the doctrine that is taught in the preceding context, and which gave rise to the language of the text. The Saviour having described the snares of affluence, and asserted the impossibility of those who trust in riches to enter into the kingdom of heaven, (as strikingly exemplified in the case of the young ruler, with whom he had been conversing,) Peter, with his usual zeal and boldness, “answered and said, Behold, we have forsaken all,” &c. These words clearly unfold the true character of Christ's disciples, and distinctly suggest the evils they renounced—the example they follow—and the reward they anticipate.

I. THE EVILS THEY RENOUNCE;—“Behold, we have *forsaken all*,” said Peter. And though Christ does not require all his followers to forsake their secular occupations and become ministers of the gospel as the apostles did, yet there are many things which we must renounce for his sake, or we cannot be his disciples, Matt. xvi. 24.

1. *We must forsake all our sinful practices.* As impenitent sinners, we “live after the flesh according to the course of this world, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind,” Eph. ii. 2, 3. But as the followers of Christ, we must mortify the deeds of the body, “cease to do evil, and learn to do well.” Every vicious habit must be fully abandoned, however painful to human nature, Matt. v. 29, 30.—Whatever is offensive to God and injurious to the soul, must be freely sacrificed to our best interests on the altar of conscience and truth.—“Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts.” All sin of every description must be faithfully renounced, as utterly inconsistent with Christian discipleship, Tit. ii. 11, 12.

2. *We must forsake all our ungodly associates.* While we are of the

world we are companions of the wicked, are actuated by the same carnal principles, and governed by the same worldly maxims. But when Divine grace apprehends and subdues sinners, and convinces them of the vanity and corruption of the world, they immediately "come out from among them, and are separate, and touch not the unclean thing," 2 Cor. vi. 17, 18. And though religion does not forbid every kind of intercourse with the wicked, yet it teaches its subjects the evil and danger of making them their constant associates and intimate friends, 2 Cor. vi. 14—16; James iv. 4. And hence, like David, they become companions of them that fear the Lord, and their delight is with the excellent of the earth.

3. *We must forsake all our unholy attachments.* Religion regards the heart as well as the life. We must not only be outwardly separated from sin and sinners, but also inwardly renewed in the spirit of our minds, Eph. iv. 22—24. An undue attachment to the world was evidently the ruin of the hopeful young man whose character and conduct are recorded in this chapter. He loved his possessions, and was unwilling to give up every thing for Christ, ver. 21, 22; Matt. x. 37, 38. But his faithful disciples "crucify the flesh with its affections and lusts," and gladly forsake sin in all its diversified forms and fascinating snares. The text also asserts,

II. *THE EXAMPLE THEY FOLLOW;*—"We have forsaken all and followed *hee*." The apostles followed Christ, both *literally* and *morally*, as his personal attendants and approved disciples. They gladly received his word, acknowledged his Messiahship, and obeyed his injunctions. In these respects we also ought to be "followers of God as dear children."

1. *We should follow Christ as our teacher, by embracing his gospel.* He is an infallible prophet, and teaches the way of God perfectly. "He spake as never man spake," Matt. vii. 28, 29.—His word is spirit and life, and able to save the soul. It must be received believingly, gratefully, experimentally, and practically "as the power of God unto salvation," John viii. 31, 32.—As willing and obedient disciples, we must affectionately imbibe, and duly improve, all the instructions of his word and Spirit, "Hear ye him."

2. *We should follow Christ as our Sovereign, by obeying his precepts.* He is the King of Zion, and sways his sceptre in his church.—As our Redeemer, Saviour, and Judge, he justly demands the obedience of mankind, 1 Cor. vi. 19, 20.—We must obey him decidedly, cheerfully, faithfully, and constantly.—In vain do we profess to be *taught* by him, and trust in him, if we do not *obey* him. Obedience is the genuine test of discipleship, Matt. vii. 20. "Ye are my friends if ye do whatsoever I command you."

3. *We should follow Christ as our pattern, by imitating his example.*—"He did no sin, neither was guile found in his mouth; for he fulfilled all righteousness."—His example is perfect, extensive, intelligible, and distinctly recorded by the evangelists for our instruction and encouragement.—As far as possible we should imbibe the spirit that he manifested, uniformly follow the example which he left for our imitation, John xiii. 15; 1 Pet. ii. 21. We shall thus "walk as he also walked," and rejoice with all his disciples in,

III. *THE REWARD THEY ANTICIPATE;*—"What shall we have therefore?" Whatever motive might prompt this important inquiry, the Saviour kindly gave a full and explicit answer in the following context, by which we are taught,

1. *Following Christ will secure our personal salvation.* They "shall inherit everlasting life," ver. 29.—Now it is impossible to obtain the inheritance of glory without a previous possession of saving grace, Heb. xii. 14.

Those who reject Christ, are condemned already; but such as embrace and follow him "are saved by grace through faith." They take his yoke upon them, and find rest unto their souls, Matt. xi. 28—40. Conformity to his image and will, constitutes both the purity and felicity of his followers.

2. *Following Christ will secure our temporal interests.*—He assured his disciples that whatever worldly advantages they might sacrifice for his sake, they would certainly "receive manifold more in the present life," ver. 29. Though he did not promise them riches, he engaged to supply all their necessities.—Religion always casts a friendly influence over all our temporal concerns, and makes "all things work together for our good." It insures every blessing, both for life and godliness, for this world and the next, Ps. lxxxiv. 11; Matt. vi. 33; 1 Tim. iv. 8.

3. *Following Christ will secure our eternal happiness.* He therefore distinctly promised this to the apostles, in his answer to Peter, ver. 28. This promise is certainly glorious in its import, and infallible in its accomplishment. It is the end that crowns the work. Christians have respect to the recompense of reward, and follow Christ from earth to heaven. He is now precious to their souls, and soon they will appear with him in glory everlasting, John xiv. 2, 3; 1 John iii. 2.

Are we the followers of Christ? Do we follow him fully, or at a distance? Let his enemies repent and believe, and escape the wrath to come. But let the saints rejoice, and "follow on to know the Lord."

THE BLESSEDNESS OF FEARING GOD.

Eccl. viii. 12.—Surely I know that it shall be well with them that fear God. (S. S.)

NOTHING certain can be determined respecting God's favor from the outward dispensations of his providence, Eccl. ix. 1.

The wicked seem on the whole to prosper more than others, Ps. lxxiii. 5, 12.

Nevertheless the godly are by far the happier persons, Ps. lxxiii. 15.

It is of them only that the assertion in the text can be made—

We propose to shew,

I. WHO THEY ARE THAT FEAR GOD.

This, we may suppose, would be a point easy to be determined—

But, through self-love and Satan's devices, many mistake respecting it—

The characters described in the text may be distinguished by the following marks:—

1. They stand in awe of God's judgments.

Once they disregarded the displeasure of the Almighty—Ps. x. 5.

They would not believe that his threatenings would be executed—

But now they have learned to tremble at his word—Isai. lxvi. 2.

Awakened by his Spirit, they exclaim with the prophet—Isai. xxxiii. 14

The scriptures uniformly represent them in this light—Acts xvi. 29. and Ps. cxix. 120.

2. They embrace the salvation offered them.

In their natural state they felt no need of a physician—Rev. iii. 17.

They saw no suitableness in the remedy which the gospel offered them—1 Cor. i. 23.

Their pride would not suffer them to submit to its humiliating terms, **Rom x. 3.**

But now they gladly embrace Christ as their only Saviour—

They flee to him, as the murderers did to a city of refuge—

This is the description given of them in the inspired volume, **Heb. vi. 18.**

3. They endeavor to keep all the commandments.

If ever they obeyed God at all, they served him only to the extent the world would approve—

Where the lax habits of mankind forbade their compliance with the divine command, they were afraid to be singular—

But they dare not any longer halt between God and Baal—

They have determined, through grace, to follow the Lord fully—

The language of their hearts is like that of David, **Ps. cxix. 5, 6.**

This was the very ground on which God concluded that Abraham feared him, **Gen. xxii. 12.**

These marks clearly distinguish those who fear God from all others.

The *formal Pharisee* has never felt his desert of condemnation, **Luke xviii. 11.**

The *merely awakened sinner* has never truly embraced the gospel, **Acts xxiv. 25, and xxvi. 23.**

The *hypocritical professor* has never mortified his besetting sin, **Acts viii. 23.**

It is *the person alone, who fears God*, that unites in his experience a dread of God's wrath, an affiance in Christ, and a love to the commandments—

Such persons, notwithstanding appearances, are truly blessed.

II. IN WHAT RESPECTS IT SHALL BE WELL WITH THEM.

They are not exempt from the common afflictions of life—

They have in addition to them many trials peculiar to themselves—

Yet it goes well with them.

1. In respect of temporal good.

They have a peculiar enjoyment of *prosperity*—

The ungodly find an emptiness in all their possessions, **Job. xx. 22.**

But the godly have not such gall mixed with their comforts, **Prov. x. 22 ; 1 Tim. vi. 17.**

They have also peculiar supports in a season of *adversity*—

The wicked are for the most part miserable in their affliction, **Eccl. v. 17**

If kept from murmuring, it is the summit of their attainments—

But the righteous are enabled to glory in tribulation, **Rom. v. 3.**

And cordially to approve of God's dispensations towards them, **2 Kings xx. 19.**

2. In respect of spiritual good.

They possess a peace that passeth all understanding—

They are filled with a joy utterly unknown to others, **Prov. xiv. 10.**

The work of sanctification is gradually carried on within them, **2 Cor. iv. 16.**

As they approach towards death they grow in a meetness for heaven—

And are serene and happy in the near prospect of eternity, **Psa. xxxvii. 37.**

3. In respect to eternal good.

Who can set forth their felicity in the eternal world?—

Who can even conceive the weight of glory preparing for them.—

How will their faith be lost in sight, and their hope in enjoyment!—

Then indeed will that truth be seen and felt by them, **Ps. cxliv. 15.**

These things are far from being “cunningly devised fables.”

III. WHAT ASSURANCE WE HAVE THAT IT SHALL BE THUS WELL WITH THEM.

No truth whatever is capable of clearer demonstration—

The topics from whence it might be proved are innumerable—

We shall however confine ourselves to three.

1. The fitness of things requires it.

No man can seriously think that there is one portion to the righteous and the wicked—

There is no well ordered government on earth where this is the case—

Much less can we suppose it possible in the divine government—

To imagine such a thing, is to strip the Deity of all regard to his own honor—

We may be sure that there shall be a distinction made in favor of his servants, Mal. iii. 18.

2. The promises of God insure it.

All *temporal* good is expressly promised to those “who fear God,” Psa. xxxiv. 9.

All *spiritual* good also is given them as their portion, Ps. xxv. 12, 13.

Yea, all *eternal* good is laid up for them as their unalienable inheritance, Ps. ciii. 17.

All the promises are made over to them in one word, 1 Tim. iv. 8.

Can any one doubt a truth so fully established?—

3. The experience of all that ever feared God attests it.

Who ever found it unprofitable to serve the Lord? Jer. ii. 31.

What truly devoted soul was ever forsaken by him? Isa. xlix. 15.

Who ever complained that the means, by which he was brought to fear God, were too severe?—

Or that any affliction, that increased and confirmed that fear, was too heavy?

David indeed did at one time question the position in the text—

But on recollection he condemned himself for his rashness and ignorance—

And acknowledged that his vile suspicions contradicted the experience of God's children in all ages, Ps. lxxiii. 12—15, 22.

On these grounds we “assuredly know” the truth declared in the text.

We do not *surmise it as a thing possible*—

We do not *hope it as a thing probable*—

We *absolutely know it as infallibly certain*—

We are not surer of our existence than we are of this truth—

Without hesitation therefore we deliver our message, Isa. iii. 10, 11

O that the word may sink deep into all our hearts!—

And that we might from experience unite our testimony to Solomon's, Prov. xxviii. 14.

We beg leave to ask, whether they who fear *not* God, have any such assurance in their favor?

We are aware that they will entertain presumptuous hopes—

And that, in opposition to God's word, they will expect happiness—

But does the boldest sinner dare affirm that he *knows* it shall be well with him?—

His conscience would instantly revolt at such falsehood and blasphemy—

Let those then, that fear not God, stand self-condemned—

Let them flee unto their God and Saviour with penitence and faith—

Let them so live as to preserve the testimony of a good conscience—

And then, however enlarged their expectations of good may be, they shall never be disappointed, Isa. xlv. 17.

THE JOY OF THE LORD IS OUR STRENGTH.

Neh. viii. 10.—The joy of the Lord is your strength. (S. S.)

THE preaching of God's word is a very ancient ordinance—

In the context we have a description of the manner in which Nehemiah conducted it—

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God is often said to rejoice over his people—Zeph. iii. 17.

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They had been enabled to surmount innumerable difficulties—ch. iv. 27.

They had prospered, even to a miracle, in their endeavors—ch. vi. 16.

These were tokens of the divine favor, and pledges of its continuance—

They were therefore called upon to rejoice with gratitude and confidence—

Nor was their sorrow, however just, to exclude this joy—

Such reason also have all the Lord's people to rejoice in the Lord,

They have experienced a redemption from sorer captivity—

And been delivered by more stupendous means—

Every day's preservation too is, as it were, a miracle—

Yet the work of their souls is carried on in spite of enemies—

Yea, is expedited through the means used to defeat it—

Surely then they should say, like the church of old—Ps. cxxvi. 3.

Moreover, these mercies are pledges and earnest of yet richer blessings—

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To promote and encourage this, we proceed to show,

II. IN WHAT RESPECTS THIS JOY IS OUR STRENGTH.

We are as dependent on the frame of our minds as on the state of our bodies—

Joy in God produces very important effects.

1. It disposes for action.

Fear and sorrow depress and overwhelm the soul—Isai. lvii. 16.

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When the spirit is oppressed, the smallest trial is a burthen—

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We consider our trials as the effects of divine *wrath*—

Or, overlooking God, we vent our indignation against the instruments he uses—

But when the soul is joyous, afflictions appear light—Heb. x. 34. & xii. 2.

How little did Paul and Silas regard their imprisonment!—Acts xvi. 25.

How willing was Paul to lay down his very life for Christ!—Acts xx. 24.

This accords with the experience of every true christian—Rom. v. 2, 3, and 2 Cor. vi. 10.

APPLICATION.

1. Let us not be always brooding over our corruptions.

Seasonable sorrows ought not to be discouraged—

But we should never lose sight of all that God has done for us—

It is our privilege to walk joyfully before the Lord—Ps. cxxxviii. 5. & cxlix. 5. & lxxxix. 15, 16.

If we abounded more in praise, we should more frequently be crowned with victory—2 Chron. xx. 21, 22.

2. Let us carefully guard against the incursions of sin.

It is sin that hides the Lord from our eyes—Isai. lix. 2.

Joy will not consist with indulged sin—Ps. lxvi. 18.

Let us then “mortify our earthly members” and our besetting sins—

Let us be girt with our armor while we work with our hands—Neh. iv. 17, 18.

Nor ever grieve the Spirit, lest we provoke him to depart from us—

3. Let us be daily going to God *through Christ*.

If ever we rejoice in God at all, it must be through the Lord Jesus Christ—Rom. v. 11.

It is through Christ alone that our past violations of the law can be forgiven—Col. i. 20.

It is through Christ alone that the good work can be perfected in our hearts—Heb. xii. 2.

And, since “all things are *through* him, and *from* him, let them be *to* him also”—Rom. xi. 36.

THE CHRISTIAN SOLDIER'S WARFARE.

Ephesians vi. 12.—For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places. (Sk.)

In this epistle, St. Paul reminds the Ephesians of their great obligations to God, on account of the gracious favors in which they were interested:

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In this epistle, St. Paul reminds the Ephesians of their great obligations to God, on account of the gracious favors in which they were interested:

and having strongly urged them to a holy deportment answerable to their principles, their profession, and their privileges, he in conclusion exhorts them to "be strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might," ver. 12.

The reason why we should be "strong in the Lord," he assigns in our text. In improving and applying which let us consider,

I. **THE ENEMIES WITH WHOM, AS CHRISTIAN SOLDIERS, WE ARE CALLED TO CONTEND.** The term "christian soldiers," is thus employed, because in this paragraph, our apostle represents our present state as a warfare. Here we are instructed to observe,

1. *Our enemies are spirits*; not composed of flesh and blood. We wrestle not with flesh and blood, but with spirits. This implies, that *they are not material and compound beings*, but simple and immaterial; and as such, are capable of unwearied exertion. *They are not objects of sight and sense*, but invisible and impalpable; able to assault us when unperceived by us. *They are not inert in their natures*, but active and restless in the execution of their mischievous devices, Job i. 7; Matt. xii. 43. *They are not, and cannot be, subject to dissolution*; but, as spirits, they must be immortal. Here we are taught to observe,

2 *Our enemies are wicked spirits.* *They are maliciously wicked*; bent on injuring us. This is evinced by *their names*: a fallen spirit is called the *devil*, or calumniator; because he slanders men to God; he slanders God to men; and slanders men to each other. This he does for the purpose of sowing discord between God and his creatures, 1 Pet. v. 8. He is called *satan*, an adversary; because he sets himself up to oppose us. He is called an *enemy*; because he is filled with enmity against us, Rev. xii. 12. He is called the *old serpent*; because in this form he tempted Eve, Rev. xii. 9. He is called *Abaddon*, and *Apollyon*, the destroyer; because he desires and seeks our destruction, Rev. ix. 11. Their malice is also evinced by *their employment*. They go about seeking to destroy us: they seek to destroy our comfort, by depriving us of peace and joy in believing, 1 Pet. i. 6. They seek to destroy our piety, by divesting us of faith, hope, love, and purity, Luke xxii. 31. They seek to destroy our *usefulness*, by drawing us into sin, and rendering us stumbling blocks to those around us, Heb. xii. 15. They seek to destroy our *souls*, by engaging us in their service here, and bringing us to their own hell, hereafter, Matt. xxv. 41. *They are daringly wicked*; they are wicked spirits in high places: they first rebelled against God even in heaven itself; there was war in heaven, Rev. xii. 7. And they still approach the most sacred places that they may injure us; they assault us amid the avocations of civil and domestic life; in our religious retirement; in God's house; and even at his table, John xiii. 27.

3. *Our enemies are formidable spirits*,—being possessed of such qualities as are calculated to inspire terror. They are formidable on account of their *number*; it is not one enemy only that we have to contend with; we wrestle, or struggle against principalities. That our enemies are numerous is evident from the cause of the demoniac, Luke viii. 30, who was possessed by a whole legion of them.

"From thrones of glory driven, by flaming vengeance hurl'd,
They throng the air, and darken heaven, and rule this lower world."

And it appears that numerous as they are, all of them are united, employed, and instructed to seek the ruin of mankind. They are formidable on account of their *strength*:—they are justly called "powers." Their *power* or ability to effect mischief, is evident from the case of Job, i. 12, ii. 6.

They are formidable on account of their *weapons*, being armed with *fiery darts*; their injections are tipped with poison, and hurled with fury. They are formidable on account of their *extensive influence*,—being rulers of the darkness of this world. The ignorance and sinfulness of mankind are subject to them, and employed against us. They are formidable on account of their *wiles*, see ver. 11; for they are naturally sagacious; and must have acquired much skill by long experience. Having considered our enemies, let us observe,

II. IN WHAT MANNER WE ARE INSTRUCTED TO CONTEND WITH THEM. From what our apostle adds on this subject, our duty is evident.

1. *We must contend with them in the armor of God.* This armor must be *all put on*, ver. 11, 14, 17. The whole of it is absolutely necessary; if any part be wanting, whether it be the girdle,—the breast-plate,—the greaves,—the helmet,—the shield,—or the sword,—the consequence must be fatal to us. This armor we must *retain* till our warfare is past, 1 Tim. i. 18, 19. This armor we must *take* and use whenever assaulted, ver. 13.

2. *We must contend with them in the spirit of prayer and watchfulness*, ver. 18. Pray with *all prayer*, that you may be strong in the Lord; that you may be girded by his wisdom and assisted by his power in all temptations. And *watch* thereunto, with all perseverance; that you may not at any time fall into the snares of your enemies, Mark xiii. 37; 1 Thess. v. 6; Eph. v. 16.

3. *We must contend with them in the exercise of firm resistance.* You must wrestle with them; in doing this, *get* all the strength you can by prayer, and *use* it, by striving against sin. Let your resistance be *early*; never enter into any league, truce, or parley with the enemy: resist him at his first approach, 1 Thess. v. 22; let your resistance be *courageous*; expect certain victory, Psal. lxxviii. 1, 2; 1 Cor. xvi. 13; and let your resistance be *unwearied*, till you conquer, Psal. xviii. 37, 38. That you may be animated to persevere in this warfare, consider,

III. THE REASONS BY WHICH WE SHOULD BE INDUCED THUS TO CONTEND. Thus contend,

1. *Because the most important objects depend on this contention.* Your *steadfastness* depends on it, for your enemies seek to cast you down, Psal. cxviii. 13; your *liberty* depends on it, for they contend with you for the mastery, 2 Tim. ii. 5; your *glory* depends on it, for they contend with you about heavenly places, Rev. iii. 11; your *eternal life* depends on it, for they aim at murdering your souls, John viii. 44; the best *interests* of your *connections* depend on it, for it is likely to be well or ill with them, as it proves with you, Deut. v. 29; Prov. iii. 33; and without *contention*, these objects cannot be secured, Matt. xi. 12.

2. *Because victory is certain to the faithful soldiers of Christ.* Victory over the *world*, 1 John v. 4; victory over *sin*, 1 John i. 7; victory over *satan*, Rom. xvi. 20; victory over *tribulation*, Rom. viii. 35—37; and victory over *death*, 1 Cor. xv. 55—57. Thus contend,

3. *Because victory will be attended with certain glory.* A *glorious rest* from all painful toil and contention, Rev. xiv. 13; *glorious exemptions* from all penal evil, Rev. ii. 11, and from all natural evil, Rev. xxi. 4; and *glorious honors*, comprising the public approval of Christ our judge, Rev. iii. 5; a *glorious throne*, Rev. iii. 21; a *glorious crown*, Rev. ii. 10; and a *glorious kingdom*, Luke xii. 32; Dan. vii. 18.

THE CHRISTIAN'S TRIUMPH.

1 Corinthians xv. 57.—But thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.—(Sk.)

IN the preceding verses of this truly interesting chapter, our apostle has been meeting the sophisms and cavils which the infidels and skeptics of his day opposed to divine truth; and, with the ability of “a master in Israel,” has illustrated and defended that important doctrine of revelation, the resurrection of the dead. And in the close of a luminous and cogent train of argumentation, he directs our attention to the powerful influence of the religion of Jesus Christ at those most solemn of all periods, the hour of death, and the morning of the final judgment: the passage immediately before us forming a kind of ejaculatory conclusion to the whole, expressive of the most lively sentiments of gratitude, for that transcendent victory which the believer, through the “Captain of (his) salvation,” is enabled to achieve

These words present to our serious consideration,

I. THE CHRISTIAN'S GLORIOUS TRIUMPH.

II. THE MEANS BY WHICH IT IS ACHIEVED.

III. THE MOTIVES TO GRATITUDE WHICH IT FURNISHES.

I. THE CHRISTIAN'S TRIUMPH naturally leads us to consider,—*the enemies encountered,—the conflict sustained,—and the success experienced.*

1. *The enemies encountered.* Victory supposes a state of warfare, and consequently assumes the existence of enemies. The christian proposes the attainment of the image of God, and the promotion of his glory: together with the enjoyment of a celestial inheritance beyond the grave; and whatever is opposed to the nature of his object, and impedes its accomplishment, may very properly be denominated his adversary. The world with its terrific frown, or its alluring and deceitful smile; the corruption and treachery of the human heart, and the mighty powers of hell, are united in close and potent combination against the christian, and the heavenly object of his pursuit. This enmity is inveterate in its nature, and perpetual in its operation. Jer. xvii. 9; John xv. 19; Rom. viii. 7; 1 Pet. v. 8.

2. *The conflict sustained.* The warfare in which the christian is engaged requires the most prompt and vigilant exertion. In order to maintain his ground, and ensure success, his resistance must be *firm*; no compromise can be allowed; no pacific overtures can exist with safety; to hesitate and parley, is to give way to the enemy, and relinquish the palm of victory. It must be with *steady perseverance*: the conquering christian maintains a firm opposition; not for a few months or a few years only, but he goes on from conquest to conquest, till his captain calls him from the field, to his eternal reward. In the spirit of *humble dependence*; though he puts forth all his energies,—gives all diligence,—firmly and perseveringly maintains his post,—yet his hope of success is founded in the wisdom, power, and faithfulness of his divine leader, 1 Pet. v. 9; 2 Pet. i. 5—10; and iii. 17; Rev. ii. 10; and xii. 11.

3. *The success experienced.* Sustaining this conflict with this constant steady reliance on his God, the christian's conquest is *certain*;—the nature of the gospel economy, the omnipotence and truth of Jehovah: and the luminous testimony of every age of time, all unite to ensure this victory. It is *complete* and *perfect* in its nature;—the believer triumphs over the world, and self, and sin;—the sting of death is extracted, and the fear of it destroyed;—he exults over the falling powers of darkness;—quits terrestrial scenes;

ascends to the throne of the Deity;—and receives the victor's crown at the hand of the captain of his salvation, 1 John iv. 4—18; 1 Cor. xv. 55, 56; 2 Tim. iv. 6—8; Rev. iii. 21.

II. THE MEANS BY WHICH THIS TRIUMPH IS ACHIEVED. It is through the operation of divine beneficence in the gospel of Jesus Christ. Hence this conquest may justly be considered.

1. *Divine in its origin.* Man in his natural state, has no disposition for this conflict; nor does he inherently possess that strength which is necessary for conquest;—yea, so far is this from being the case, that all his inclinations and energies are in unison with those of the enemies of God, and decidedly hostile to the cause of truth, Gal. v. 19—21; therefore, both the disposition for conflict, and the strength for conquest, are derived,—they flow from the exhaustless fountain of goodness, through the channel of gospel provision, Jer. xiii. 23; 1 Cor. iv. 7; Ephes. ii. 1—8.

2. *Free in its communication.* “The gift of God.” Every blessing bestowed upon man by the author of good, is communicated freely; because man is the subject of guilt and condemnation, and has nothing of a meritorious nature to recommend or entitle him to the notice of Jehovah;—nor can he, in any way, ever remunerate or benefit a Being who is self-existent, self-dependent, and eternal;—one who is in his own nature perfectly and independently happy, Isa. lv. 1; 2 Tim. i. 9.

3. *It proceeds through the medium of sacrifice.* “Through our Lord Jesus Christ.” God is a being who is just as well as merciful: man, by transgression, has violated the rights of divine justice, and offered insult to this perfection of the Deity:—justice required satisfaction; but poor insolvent, self-ruined man could render none. Jesus Christ became our “surety;” “he bore our sins in his own body on the tree.” Justice is honored: yea—

“Here the whole Deity is known;
Nor dares a creature guess,
Which of the glories brightest shone,
The Justice or the Grace.”

See Isa. liii. 4—6; John i. 29; Rom. v. 8; Tit. ii. 14; 1 Pet. ii. 24.

III. THE MOTIVES TO GRATITUDE WHICH IT FURNISHES. The most lively gratitude is ever due from man to God, for the manifold favors which he continually receives at his hands; but the anticipation of this victory ought, above every other consideration, to excite the christian to sing, “Bless the Lord O my soul, and all that is within me praise his holy name;” because of

1. *Our entire unworthiness.* Man being in his natural state a rebel against God,—opposed to his government,—his holiness,—and his truth,—in short, decidedly hostile to all the perfections of his nature,—has nothing to expect, on the principles of justice, but the satisfaction of its claims, by an interminable perpetuity of suffering; for a being thus circumstanced to be delivered from this just extremity of woe, and to be enabled to triumph over “the last enemy,” and participate the felicities of heaven, ought to call forth bursts of grateful adoration, Ps. xxxiii. 1.

2. *The amazing love which is displayed in this triumph.* The value of a gift is materially augmented, and the obligations to gratitude increased, by the difficulties and sacrifices which may be connected with its communication. Though nothing is difficult to the “Lord God Omnipotent,” yet there is a sacrifice connected with the process of human redemption, of the most unparalleled description;—the Father delivered up his Son to poverty,

ignominy, and death, in order to extricate rebellious man from the gulf of ruin, John iii. 16; Rom. v. 8—11; 1 John iii. 1.

3. *The glorious result of this victory.* The believer not only experiences a victory over the world and sin, and triumphs over the fears of death, but also enters the regions of immortality; mingles with seraphic bands;—participates the glory of the Redeemer;—beholds, with ceaseless rapturous gaze, the transporting perfections of Jehovah;—swells the song of salvation;—and drinks full draughts at that exhaustless stream of joy which issued from the throne of God, Matt. xxii. 30; 1 Pet. i. 4; Rev. iii. 21, and vii. 15, 16, 17. Surely a victory replete with such blissful consequences demands the highest strains of praise from those who have a lively anticipation of it.

This subject, 1. Suggests the institution of a minute inquiry respecting the part we are taking in this warfare. And,

2. Furnishes ample consolation to the conflicting, suffering soldier of Christ.

HOPE IN DEATH.

Proverbs xiv. 32.—The righteous hath hope in his death. (Sk.)

THE most part of this book of Proverbs consists of short independent sentences, spoken by Solomon, the wisest of men, and as the Jews tell us, in the middle age of his life, when his understanding was in its greatest vigor, and under the inspiration too of the Holy Spirit of truth. Coherency of the parts, and dependence of one thing upon another, is not to be expected in a book of aphorisms; for every sentence is to be taken by itself, and includes an entire sense. We come therefore immediately to the words of the text,—“The righteous hath hope in his death.” We shall,

I. ATTEND TO THE CHARACTER OF THE PERSONS THAT HAVE HOPE IN THEIR DEATH.

II. SPEAK AS TO THE OBJECT OF THEIR HOPE, OR SHOW WHAT THINGS THEY HOPE FOR.

I. ATTEND TO THE CHARACTER OF THE PERSONS THAT HAVE HOPE IN THEIR DEATH:—“the righteous.”

1. On the mention of this character, that passage of the apostle is apt to offer itself to our minds, “*There is none righteous, no not one,*” Rom. iii. 10. Where then are the righteous persons to be found, that have hope in their death? We must consider, that the apostle, in the place quoted, means the legally righteous; none such indeed are to be found on earth; but Solomon here speaks of those that are righteous in a gospel sense, and many such are to be found.

2. *All men are now in a fallen state.* God made the first man perfect. Eccl. vii. 29; after his own image, Gen. i. 27; in integrity or righteousness, which was his honor; but he did not abide in the state in which he was made. The law that was given him to observe, he soon transgressed, though furnished with full ability to keep it; and so lost his innocence, or legal righteousness, made himself sinful, and brought guilt and moral pollution upon all his natural offspring. So that there is none righteous so as to be innocent and sinless: not one; all are conceived and born in sin, Psa. il 5, and so are sinners by nature. And as to practice, “there is not a

just,' or righteous, "man on earth that doeth good, and sinneth not," in a legal sense, Eccl. vii. 20.

3. *Yet every true believer in Christ is righteous, according to the covenant of grace.* Every believer in Christ is in him, and has righteousness imputed to him, 1 Cor. i. 30. It pleased God on the fall of the first Adam, to set up his Son as a second Adam, that "as by the offense of one judgment came upon all men to condemnation, even so by the righteousness of one the free gift came upon all men to justification of life:" that "by one man's disobedience many were made sinners, so by the obedience of one shall many be made righteous," Rom. v. 18, 19. God hath made Christ, who knew no sin, a sin offering for us, that we might be made the righteousness of God through him, 2 Cor. v. 21. This system was the contrivance of infinite wisdom, originated in the free grace of God, is a doctrine that could be only known by divine revelation, in which it is exhibited in the clearest light: "the righteousness of God, by the faith of Jesus Christ, to all and upon all that believe," Rom. iii. 22. Believers in Christ are justified before God; their guilt is taken away; they are constituted righteous, restored to the divine favor, enjoy inward peace, and possess a title to heaven.

4. *Believers in Christ have also an inherent righteousness wrought in them by the Holy Spirit.* They are renewed by the Holy Ghost, Tit. iii. 5; and made partakers of divine nature, 2 Pet. i. 4. Though free justification and entire sanctification are different degrees of a work of grace on the heart, yet the former is preparatory to the latter; and even the former blessing is inseparably connected with the reign of grace within. "Sin shall not have dominion over you, for ye are not under the law, but under grace," Rom. vi. 14. All that live in the favor of God are graciously fitted for a life of holiness. They are created in Christ to good works, Eph. ii. 10; and with their new nature they have the Spirit of God put within them, to cause them to walk in his statutes, Ezek. xxxvi. 27.

5. *Believers in Christ are not only habitually righteous by their regeneration, but they endeavor to be actually righteous in imitation of Christ.* Being united to him, and led by his Spirit, they endeavor to walk as he walked. And the apostle says, "He that doeth righteousness is righteous, even as he is righteous," 1 John iii. 7. Being born again, born from heaven, they are in the way of faith and holiness tending thither. They delight in the law of God after the inward man, and endeavor a conformity to it in the whole course of their actions. What God requires they sincerely try to render to him, the superlative love of their heart, and the impartial and constant obedience of their lives. These now are the righteous persons who have hope in their death.

II. SHOW THE OBJECT OF THEIR HOPE, OR WHAT THINGS THEY HOPE FOR IN THEIR DYING MOMENTS. Hope is an expectation of something future and good, which God has promised; and the expectation of it is attended with pleasure and delight, in proportion to their thoughts of its excellency, and to the assurance with which they expect to enjoy it. Accordingly, the christian's hope is called "the rejoicing of hope," Heb. iii. 6. We shall mention a few things the righteous hope for in their dying moments.

1. *They hope for the gracious presence of God with them in that solemn crisis.* And indeed they never more need his reviving, supporting, and protecting presence, than when called to walk through the valley of the shadow of death. Their hope of this necessary and important blessing

is founded on such promises as these: "I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee," Heb. xiii. 5; "This God is our God for ever and ever: he will be our guide even unto death," Ps. xlviii. 14. "My flesh and my heart fail: but God is the strength of my heart, and my portion for ever," Ps. lxxiii. 26. It is the consciousness of this gracious presence of God with them in their latter end that fortifies them against desponding fears, and refreshes their souls with light and comfort, when all other things appear dark and gloomy about them. Hence, David says, "Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil; for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me," Ps. xxiii. 4. From this promised grace and powerful presence of God, they hope for safety in their passage from this to the future world.

2. *The hope for the immediate admission of their souls into heaven:* that having guided them with his counsel during life, He will at death receive their spirits into glory, Ps. lxxiii. 24, to dwell in his presence, where there is fulness of joy, and pleasures for evermore, Ps. xvi. 11; where all evil is excluded, and all good is present, to fill the largest extent of their desires and wishes. The hope of this is founded on several promises: "If I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there you may be also," John xiv. 3. Christ in his testament, which is of force and unalterable by his death, appoints to his saints a kingdom, into which being risen, he as forerunner, is for them entered, with a declared purpose to prepare for their coming, and to keep open the way by his intercession. Hereupon their death comes under his direction and ordering, as having the keys of death and the invisible world. And when he sends death for the souls of believers, they have the like privilege that Stephen had, of committing them into his hand, as ready to receive them, and present them with acceptance to the Father. And thus being "absent from the body they are present with the Lord," which is far better, 2 Cor. v. 8; Phil. I. 23; added to the "spirits of just men made perfect," Heb. xii. 23; and so they enter into the joy of their Lord, Matt. xxv. 21.

3. *The righteous, in death, hope for the resurrection of their bodies in the appointed season, to a glorious immortality.* The hope of this they found on that declaration, "This is the Father's will who hath sent me, that of all which he hath given me I should lose nothing, but should raise it up at the last day," John vi. 39. The apostle says, "I have hope towards God, that there shall be a resurrection of the dead, both of the just and unjust," Acts xxiv. 15. Though the believers go down to the grave, they do not lose their relation to Christ, but remain united to him. They sleep in Jesus, and under his eye as guardian of the dust, which, however scattered, is precious and sacred; and them that sleep in Jesus will God bring with him, 1 Thess. iv. 14. Christ's resurrection is the pattern and pledge of the resurrection of the bodies of the saints, and will infer it as desirable and blessed. Christ being risen from the dead is become the first fruits of them that sleep, 1 Cor. xv. 20; and as he rose in glory, they shall in this respect be conformed to him, Phil. iii. 21. All this the righteous die in the hope of, and therefore can freely deposit their flesh in the dark and silent grave, where it shall rest in hope; foreseeing that eventful time, when it shall be raised from thence with unspeakable advantage, every way suited to the noblest operations of the perfected soul, and to all the important uses of the resurrection state.

4 *The righteous in their dying moments have a hope of eternal life,*

and complete salvation of their entire nature, soul and body, reunited at the resurrection; of all the promised glories of the heavenly state. Eternal life is the great promise of the gospel. "This is the promise that he hath promised us, even eternal life," 1 John ii. 25; and, "in hope of eternal life," Tit. i. 2. All the hopes of christian believers look towards this, and centre in it. These are some of the chief things the righteous hope for in death.

APPLICATION,—

The use that we are to make of this subject is obvious. Let us labor to be righteous persons, in order to our having hope in our death; to have our sins pardoned through faith in the sacrifice of Christ, our souls sanctified by the Holy Spirit, and then to be holy in all manner of conversation. To this end, let us beg of God, in the name of Christ, for the Holy Spirit to assist us in the exercise of faith, to renew our nature, and enable us to walk in newness of life. And being on impartial trial, that we are real christians, let us live and die "waiting for the hope of righteousness," as the apostle describes the believers in his day, Gal. v. 5.

THE CHRISTIAN PILGRIMAGE.

1 Chron. xxix. 15.—For we are strangers and sojourners, as were all our fathers. (O.)

In the preceding part of the chapter, we find king David, after having by his own example and entreaty requested the princes and the people to offer liberally in behalf of the house of God, who is not confined to temples made with hands, but fills heaven and earth, and the temple of the universe itself with his presence.—Hence the doxology begins at the 10th verse—

In the sequel we shall attend,

I. TO THE CONDITION OF THE PEOPLE OF GOD IN THIS WORLD—they are strangers and sojourners.

II. THEIR AVOWAL OF IT—"we are strangers and sojourners."

I. The saints are strangers and sojourners on the earth, because they are born from above—born not of corruptible seed but of incorruptible, which is the word of God, by the resurrection of our Lord Jesus from the dead: begotten again unto a lively hope of the heavenly inheritance—

They are born from above, having the blood-royal of heaven running in their moral veins: and therefore with a loftiness of sentiment becoming their high descent, naturally aspire after their native land. Having discovered something more noble than any thing which this world can afford; they leave to others the vain and the inordinate pursuits of its riches, its pleasures and its honors—

The saints are strangers and sojourners upon the earth, because they are absent from their best friends. An individual going to a foreign country, has generally few if any friends in that country. So in like manner christians have many foes, but comparatively few friends in the present world: their nearest and dearest and best friends in heaven. There dwells God their Father—Jesus Christ—the Holy Spirit—the sons of light, angels and arch-angels—Abraham, Isaac and Jacob—the prophets—the twelve apostles—the noble host of martyrs—all our pious friends.

They may be called strangers and sojourners, because their inheritance is in heaven. Strangers have generally no landed property or possessions in the foreign countries through which they travel—

So in like manner, the people of God have no portion in this world—their inheritance is in heaven—

Convinced, therefore, of the unsatisfactory notion of all earthly enjoyment, they look out for something more substantial—

The well-founded and lively hope of soon entering upon the enjoyment of this glorious inheritance, sustains them in every trial, wipes the tear from the eye that is dim with sorrow and sustains and animates and cheers them amidst all the ills of life—

The saints are strangers and pilgrims on the earth, because they are surrounded by many enemies and exposed to many dangers—

They find, in the natives of the country through which they pass, inveterate enemies. They are different in their moral pedigree; the men of the world are the children of the wicked one, love and serve him.—But they are the children of the Most High and as such serve and worship him, submit to his authority and obey his laws. This causes the children of the world to persecute the saints of God.—But besides the seductions of a wicked world, they have likewise to encounter the fierce assaults and the fiery attacks of the wicked one from without: while powerful corruptions lodge within their own breasts, throwing numerous barriers in the way of their progress towards heaven—

The people of God may be styled strangers and sojourners on earth, because they are making progress on their way towards heaven. A traveller is always desirous to reach the place of his destination and for this purpose is bending his course towards it.

So in like manner, the spiritual sojourners notwithstanding the great opposition and the numerous enemies which they have to encounter, will always be making progress in their journey—

The saints are strangers and sojourners on the earth, because their continuance here is short and uncertain. As the stranger only turns aside for the night, and in the morning pursues his journey, so the continuance of the spiritual traveller in this world is short and uncertain, Job xiv. 18, 19.

Human life even when protracted to its utmost verge is but a hand-breadth and a span. It has now decreased in a ten-fold proportion to what it once was; but even when prolonged to its former period, it was but a point—it was nothing when compared with eternity—

The saints, like strangers and pilgrims, will forget all their sorrows, and reflect with pleasure on the dangers of their earthly pilgrimage, when they reach their eternal home. As a traveller forgets all the hardships, which he endured on his travels, when he arrives at his native country, and recounts with pleasure his adventures, his difficulties and dangers to his admiring friends and beloved family—as the tempest-tost mariner—as the warrior—

So shall the saints forget their sorrows, and recall with pleasure the dangers of their earthly pilgrimage when they arrive at their Father's house—

II. THEIR AVOWAL OF IT.

They confess it by their words, as well as by their actions—Abraham confessed that he was a stranger and sojourner with the children of Heth. Jacob confessed it to Pharaoh—David—Moses—

They confess it likewise by their actions. It frequently happens that men say one thing and mean another, so that their actions belie their words. But Christians by their garb and language, by their practice and profession, by their sorrows and joys, and the whole tenor of their conduct, plainly testify to the world that they are strangers and pilgrims on earth.

IMPROVEMENT.

If we regard this world as a strange country, through which we are *passing* to our native home, we should endeavor to sustain as little injury by the way as possible—

Let us abstain from fleshly lusts that war against the soul—

If we are really strangers and pilgrims, we will strive to be suitably prepared for our journey and make ample provision for that better country to which we are travelling—

It becomes strangers and pilgrims to endure, with patience and fortitude, all the ills they meet with in their journey heavenward—

If we view this world only as a scene of our pilgrimage, and heaven as the place of our eternal abode, we should above all things be solicitous about the way that leads to it—

If we are strangers and pilgrims here, we ought to maintain a deportment like those who belong to a better country.—

If we are strangers and pilgrims here, we should love one another as brethren and assist one another by the way—

CHAPTER V.

CHRISTIAN DUTIES.

ON THE ACCEPTABLE SERVICE OF GOD.

Hebrews xii. 28.—We receive a kingdom which cannot be moved, let us have grace, whereby we may serve God acceptably, with reverence and godly fear. (B.)

THE Apostle having stated, in the foregoing verses, the pre-eminent privileges and prospects to which true believers in Christ are admitted, and having shown, by a reference to the prophecy of Haggai, ch. ii. 6, the stability and permanence of the New Testament dispensation, which is to remain to the end of time as the only form a Divine worship and religion acceptable to God, from which alone men can obtain a certain and bright prospect of everlasting glory, he adds the words of the text, as a practical inference from his argument. See ver. 18—27.—Consider,

I. WHAT IS IMPLIED IN SERVING GOD, AND WHEN IT MAY BE SAID WE *SERVE* HIM ACCEPTABLY.

To serve God is to worship him. Matt. iv. 10; Luke iv. 8; 1 Sam. vii. 3. See particularly Heb. ix. 1. where ordinances of Divine worship are termed “ordinances of Divine service;” and ver. 9, where worshipping God is termed “doing service;” and Acts xxvi. 7, where the twelve tribes, worshipping God stedfastly, are said to “serve him night and day.” But what is it to worship God? It is to do him homage *outwardly*, by attending his appointed ordinances, public and domestic; *inwardly*, acknowledging, and being sensible of our dependence on him for life, and breath, and all things, temporal and spiritual: of our obligations to him as our Creator, Preserver, &c.; for all we are, (our members, senses, faculties;) for all we have; (time, talents, blessings;) for all we hope for, in this world or the next; of his absolute power and authority over us, as our Lawgiver, Gov-

ernor, and Judge.—It is to venerate his matchless glories; to adore and praise him with seriousness and solemnity, awe, and self-abasement, with joy and delight.—It is to feel in ourselves, and manifest to others, affections and dispositions suited to his Divine attributes, and the blessed relations in which he stands to us. (Explain this, and show that this alone is worshipping in spirit, and therefore in truth. John iv. 23, 24; Phil. iii. 3.)—In prayer, it is to ask only for what we really need, and what his word authorizes us to ask, and to do so with sincerity, fervency, and perseverance, and in faith.—It is to give thanks with gratitude of heart:—to hear, read, and meditate on his word with sincere desire, concern, and resolution, through God's help:—to understand, believe, and experience the efficacy of it, and to practice what we hear:—to receive the Lord's supper with faith and devotion, so as to “feed on Christ in our hearts with thanksgiving.” This, and only this, is to worship acceptably,—

It is to be subject and obedient to him, as a servant to a master, Rom. vi. 16; xii. 1.—We must yield ourselves to him. Rom. vi. 19, intelligently, willingly, entirely, and irrevocably, to be his subjects, servants, sons, and daughters, to which relations we are invited. This implies, that we no longer yield ourselves to the world, the flesh, sin, Satan, but to the Lord, with desire that he would, and in confidence that he does, accept us through his Son. Hereby we are joined to the Lord to serve him. Isa. lvi. 6. As his servants, we must give evidence of our subjection and obedience to his will in all things universally; Ps. cxix. 6; constantly. 1 Cor. x. 30.—In holiness, Luke i. 74, towards God; dying to, and delivered from the power of sin, Rom. vi. 18, the world, Gal. vi. 14, our own wisdom, will, and carnal inclinations. Gal. ii. 20. This implies, to be dedicated to God, employed for him, conformed to him.—In righteousness towards our neighbor, including truth, justice, mercy, charity, and its fruits.—

It is to serve his cause; that which he is carrying on in the world: advancing his glory, and the present and everlasting good of mankind, by promoting the progress of his gospel, or of his truth and grace among men. John xii. 26.—

As to the properties of this service.—It must be in sincerity and truth; Josh. xxiv. 14; termed by David, “a perfect heart.” 1 Chron. xxviii. 9.—With reverence and godly fear, (text,) from a sense of his presence, Luke i. 75, before him, his glory, wisdom, power, eternity, immensity, supremacy. To which should be added, a watchful fear of our enemies, Prov. xxviii. 14. and a jealous fear of ourselves. Heb. iv. 1.—In confidence, or without a slavish fear; Luke i. 74; Rom. viii. 15; 2 Tim. i. 7; and a confidence arising from the mediation of Christ, Justification through him, Rom. v. 1, and the testimony of our conscience. 1 John iii. 21.—In humility of mind, Acts xx. 19; Mic. vi. 8, arising from a deep sense of the distance between him and us, and a consciousness that we are unworthy to be permitted to serve him, and that our best services are unworthy of his acceptance.—In resignation under all his dispensations, persuaded that his providence is over all; that all his dispensations are wise, just, and gracious; that his eye is upon each of his servants; that he puts each of them in his proper place, and will make all things work for their good.—In meekness, gentleness, &c. towards all men, even enemies.—All our services are to flow chiefly from love as their principle, to be guided by the Divine will as their rule, and directed to the glory of God as their end. 1 Cor. x. 31. Thus they will be performed with a “willing mind,” 1 Chron. xxviii. 9; Matt. vi. 24, and the service of God will be perfect freedom.—

II. THE REASONABLENESS AND IMPORTANCE OF THUS SERVING HIM.

Every part of this service is reasonable, Rom. xii. 1, being different from the unreasonable services of the heathen in the worship of their gods, their bloody, lewd, ridiculous, unmeaning rites; the expensive, burdensome, shadowy, and hardly intelligible sacrifices and ceremonies of the Jews.—The christian's service of faith, love, and obedience is highly reasonable. For faith has for its object, not lies, but truth; love has beauty, excellence, goodness; and obedience commands, which are wise, holy, good. Few ceremonies are enjoined, and those most significant, as the sabbath, baptism, and the Lord's supper. Thus it far exceeds the service of the tabernacle and temple, though of Divine institution.—

It is reasonable we should perform this service.—In justice: for we are God's by right of creation, preservation, and redemption.—In gratitude; for his numberless and great benefits.—Its infinite importance appears in that it is *our great interest*, in time and eternity.—

III. HOW WE MAY BE ENABLED TO SERVE THE LORD AS ABOVE DESCRIBED.

We must "have grace."—*Enlightening* grace. In order to our serving God, we must "know" him 1 Chron. xxviii. 9, must be acquainted with him; must know ourselves, or we shall not be humble, resigned, meek, as we ought to be; must know the Mediator, through whom alone we can come to God; must know God's will, or we cannot do it; and must know the truths of the gospel in general, which have a connexion with, and influence on our serving God.—*Quickening* grace; awakening the mind to a sense of the certainty and importance of spiritual and eternal things; convincing, humbling, begetting repentance unto life, a living faith, union with Christ, a spiritual mind.—*Pardoning* grace. See Heb. ix. 15. Without this we cannot serve God with confidence, hope, love, joy, peace, &c.—*Renewing* grace; for a corrupt tree cannot bring forth good fruit, nor an impure fountain send forth clear streams. The heart must be changed, that the life may be changed: and we must be "created in Christ Jesus unto good works," if we would walk in them. Eph. ii. 10.—*Strengthening* grace; inspiring fortitude, resolution, constancy, and power to resist the devil, overcome the world, crucify the flesh, conquer the power of sin, and the fear of death; and enabling us to do, and persevere in doing, the whole will of God.—*Comforting* grace; supporting us in the midst of reproaches, injuries, losses, afflictions, the death of relatives and friends, and the various trials and troubles which we shall certainly meet with, chiefly by immortal hopes, and an earnest of heaven in our hearts.—

CHRISTIAN PROFESSORS SHOULD IMITATE CHRIST.

1 John ii. 6.—He that saith he abideth in him ought himself also so to walk, even as he walked. (B.)

MANKIND, even in these christian countries so called, seem to be but too generally comprehended in two classes,—one consisting of persons who make no serious profession of true religion at all; and the other of those who make an empty, or, at least, inconsistent profession of it. With persons of the former class I have nothing to do on the present occasion; indeed it is not easy for a preacher of the gospel to have to do with them at any time, for they will take care not to come within the sound of his voice. But to the latter, many of whom are commonly present from time to time in all places of Divine worship, and therefore are probably here, I will address myself, especially on one point, the vast importance of imitating and resembling him, in whom we profess to believe, and whose disciples we regard ourselves. I am the more inclined to speak on this subject, because I am apprehensive that it is one much overlooked among some professors; and that on this account true and vital religion is greatly on the decline with them. Indeed, if I know anything of the christian world, it is verging fast towards Antinomianism. Men are beginning, more and more, to content themselves with mere doctrinal christianity, and to rest satisfied with right notions of those things in their heads, which they ought to experience in their hearts, and practice in their lives. This anti-christianism was beginning to pervade the church even in the Apostle's days, and some of them, especially St. James and St. John, used their utmost efforts to check the encroaching evil. This is evident from the general tenor of their epistle. As to St. John, it appears from many passages of this his first epistle, and especially from the paragraph from whence I take my text.—Inquire we,

I. WHAT IT IS TO "ABIDE IN HIM?" AND WHO MUST BE UNDERSTOOD AS SAYING THAT THEY ABIDE IN HIM?

To abide in Christ, is to continue—in those relations in which, as children of God, we stand to him, as his disciples, his subjects, his servants, his friends, his brethren, his spouse.—In an interest in him as a Teacher, a Mediator, and a Saviour, being enlightened, reconciled, and saved by him; as our wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, and redemption.—In union with him, as the foundation on which we are built, the true vine of which we are branches, the living head of which we are members.—

The Apostle does not speak here merely of saying in word, but of professing, and even of saying in our heart, or thinking respecting ourselves that we "abide in him." Now those who profess to abide in faith, in Christ and the Gospel, or to continue to be believers, do in effect profess to abide in him, for all true believers are in him. Gal. ii. 20; Rom. xi. 20; Rom. i. 16; 1 John v. 13.—All who profess to abide in hope, viz., an hope of eternal life, profess to abide in him; for all hope of eternal life, that is well grounded and lively, flows from union with Christ. Col. i. 27, 28.—All who profess to abide in love, profess to abide in him. 1 John iv. 16. Love is the fruit of the Spirit of Christ dwelling in us, Gal. v. 22, and can only be where he is.—All who profess to be in a justified state, profess to abide in him; for those to whom "there is no condemnation," "walk not after the flesh, but after the spirit," and "the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus hath made them free from the law of sin and death." Rom. viii. 1, 2; 1 John v. 11, 12.—All who profess to be regenerated, or convert-

ed, or created anew, profess to abide in him; for only those that are "in Christ" are new creatures; 2 Cor. v. 17; and those that are created unto good works, are "created in Christ Jesus." Eph. ii. 10.—

II. IN WHAT SENSE, AND IN WHAT RESPECTS, SUCH OUGHT TO "WALK EVEN AS HE WALKED."

To "walk," here is a figurative expression, intended as in numberless other passages, to signify our spirit and conduct, all our dispositions, words and actions—and that towards God, our neighbor, and ourselves. If we profess to abide in Christ, or think we abide in him, we ought to take care that we be conformed to his example, in our tempers, words, and works. John xii. 26; Phil. ii. 5; Col. ii. 6; 1 Pet. ii. 21; text.

In what respects?—In seriousness of mind; not gloominess, or sullenness, or moroseness, but habitual seriousness, solemnity and awe, knowing that we are always in the presence of God, and on the verge of death, of judgment, and eternity, and that we have no light matters, but matters of everlasting moment, to attend to and insure. Thus Christ walked, and thus we ought to walk. In watchfulness, as conscious of the various dangers and the enemies which surround us. In self-denial.—In a spirit of abstraction and separation from the world. Jam. iv. 4; Matt. vi. 24; John xvii. 14, 16.—In spiritual-mindedness.—In love to God; John xiv. 31; 1 John iv. 16, 19; to his people; Eph. v. 1, 2; John xv. 12, 13; 1 John iv. 7; to all men, even our enemies. Luke xxiii. 34.—In zeal. John ii. 17.—In humility before God and man. Matt. xi. 29.—In resignation and patience before God. Matt. xxvi. 39, 42, 44.—In meekness and gentleness towards man. 2 Cor. x. 1; 1 Pet. ii. 23.—In a long-suffering and forgiving spirit. Eph. iv. 31, 32.—In a merciful, compassionate, and sympathizing disposition. Matt. xiv. 14; John xi. 35; Heb. ii. 17; iv. 15.—In blamelessness. Heb. vii. 26.—In usefulness, employing every grace and gift, and all our time and talents, for the glory of God, and the good of our fellow creatures. Acts x. 38; John iv. 34.—In temperance and chastity. In purity and universal holiness. John viii. 46; Heb. vii. 26.—

[Conclude, by showing how we may be conformed to his example, and walk as he walked.]—

THE DUTY OF CASTING OUR CARE ON GOD.

1 Pet. v. 7.—Casting all your care upon him, for he careth for you. (S. S.)

INEXPERIENCED christians are generally partial in their views of religion—

They often exalt one duty, to the neglect, if not the exclusion of another—

But a proficiency in the divine life will discover itself by the united exercise of the various, and apparently opposite, graces—

Faith will not exclude fear, nor meekness fortitude—

Every grace will be limited and tempered by some other—

The soul must be humbled before God in dust and ashes—

Yet should it rely on him with most implicit confidence—ver. 6, 7.

I. THE DUTY OF CHRISTIANS.

Christians have learned "not to seek great things for themselves"—

Hence they are free from the corroding cares of avarice and ambition—
But they still have many grounds of care.

They cannot but feel some concern respecting their bodily wants—

The casualties of life may also occasion some uneasiness—

But they have other cares far more weighty and important—

They see many dishonoring their holy profession—

They feel within themselves also "an evil heart of unbelief"—

Nor are they ignorant of satan's devices to overthrow them—

Moreover, they frequently anticipate future evils—

And tremble, lest in the day of adversity they should faint—

Thus do they torment themselves with anxious and desponding fears—

It is their duty, however, to "cast their care on God."

To cast their care upon any creature would be fruitless—

And it would involve them in the deepest guilt—Jer. xvii. 5.

God alone is able to sustain their burthen—

On him they are commanded to cast it—Ps. lv. 22.

They must do so in the exercise of faith and prayer—Phil. iv. 6, 7.

Nor are any cares whatever to be excepted, "Cast *all*," &c.

None are so small but they shall be regarded, none so great but they shall be alleviated—

There is a backwardness in many to comply with this duty.

II. THEIR ENCOURAGEMENT TO PERFORM IT.

God extends his care to the whole creation—

But in a more especial manner careth for his people—

He conducted the Jews through the wilderness—

He interposed for them in all their dangers—

He supplied their every want—Ps. cv. 39—41.

Thus, though less visibly, he still regards those who trust in him—

He watches over them for good—2 Chron. xvi. 9.

He limits and restrains all their adversaries—Ps. lxx. vi. 10.

He sympathizes with them in all their afflictions—Isa. lxiii. 9. Heb v. 15.

He imparts to them all temporal and spiritual blessings—Ps. lxxxiv. 11.

He hears and answers all their supplications—John xv. 7.

He accounts them his most inestimable treasure—Mal. iii. 17.

He communes with them as his sons and daughters—2 Cor. vi. 18.

He takes upon him the management of all their concerns—Isa. xlvi. 4.

What encouragement does this afford us to trust in him!

Our guardian and protector is infinitely *wise*—Isa. xxviii. 29.

He knows what trials we stand in need of—

He can suit all the circumstances of them to our necessities—

He can overrule them for our eternal benefit—

He is possessed of *almighty* power, Job xl. 2.

There is no difficulty from which he cannot extricate—Isa. 1. 2, and xliii. 13.

Nor duty which he cannot enable us to discharge—

Should we, for whom such wisdom and power are exercised, be anxious?
—Isa. xl. 27, 28.

Moreover he is *good* and gracious.

What innumerable blessings has he already bestowed upon us!

He has even given his own Son to die for us—

What then can we have to fear, if we trust in him?—Rom. viii. 32.

Above all, he is a *faithful* God.

He has promised seasonable protection and strength—Isa. liv. 10. Deut. xxxiii. 25. 1 Cor. x. 13.

And is not his word a sure ground of confidence?—2 Sam. xxii. 31. Heb. x. 23.

Surely then we should be filled with consolation rather than with care—Heb. vi. 18.

INFER,—

1. How needful is it that all should acquaint themselves with God!

Gaiety and dissipation may bear up the spirit in prosperity—

But God alone can comfort us in adversity—Job xxxv. 10.

At the hour of death we shall all need divine support—

Let the careless then begin to reflect upon their state—

Let them provide a refuge against the day of trouble—

Let them follow that salutary advice—Job xxii. 21.

2. How happy would christians be if they rightly enjoyed their privileges!

It is their privilege to be “without carefulness”—1 Cor. vii. 32.

If they trusted in God as they ought, nothing could disturb them—Isa. xxvi. 3.

Hence that exhortation to joy in God—Ps. v. 11, 12.

Let the afflicted saints then commit themselves to him—Mic. v. 4.

Let them know that duty is theirs, but events are his—

Let them, in the face of all difficulties, adopt the words of Joshua—Numb. xiv. 9.

Let them, with Hezekiah, repose themselves on God—2 Chron. xxxii. 7, 8.

THE NECESSITY OF PRAYER

Ezek. xxxvi. 37.—Thus saith the Lord God: I will yet for this be inquired of by the house of Israel, to do it for them; I will increase them with men like a flock. (Sk.)

THERE is a very striking analogy between the natural and the spiritual world; between the productions of nature, and the operations of divine grace. In the former, a variety of means are necessary for the attainment of providential mercies; and in the latter, the duties of religion are essentially connected with the enjoyment of its personal privileges. In both cases the ends are made to depend on the means, which by virtue of the divine appointment and influence, are rendered efficient and successful. This is particularly evident in the important duty of prayer. The Lord has graciously promised innumerable blessings to mankind in his word; but in order to obtain them, we must earnestly call upon his name, with penitent and believing hearts. This chapter contains various promises, both of temporal and spiritual blessings to the Jews, which are also generally applicable to the Gentiles; but we are assured in the text, that they can only be realized by faithful prayer;—“Thus saith the Lord God,” &c. These words will lead us to consider,

I. THE BLESSINGS FOR WHICH WE SHOULD INQUIRE ;—"I will yet *for this* be inquired of by the house of Israel." This language manifestly refers to the inestimable benefits promised in the preceding context. Whatever God promises we may humbly desire and pray for, both for our own salvation and the welfare of all mankind.

1. *We should pray for ourselves.* We are sinful, indigent, and dependent creatures. God only can supply our wants and satisfy our desires. To him we must come, and devoutly inquire for every blessing which our circumstances need, 2 Cor. ix. 8; Phil. iv. 19.—Such as pardoning mercy—adopting love—quickenings power—sanctifying grace—the indwelling Spirit—the consolations of piety,—ver. 25—27;—Ps. li. 9—12.—for light in darkness—strength in weakness—succor in temptation—assistance in duty—guidance in difficulty—peace in trouble—victory over enemies—triumph in death—and a blissful immortality beyond the grave, Ps. lxxxi. 10; Phil. iv. 6; Heb. iv. 16. For these and all necessary and promised blessings, for body and soul, for time and eternity, we must incessantly seek, and inquire of "the God of all grace."

2. *We should pray for the church of God.* Good men regard all the subjects of piety as brethren, Eph. iv. 4—6.—They feel interested in each other's welfare, and desire the peace and prosperity of Zion, Ps. cxxii. 6—9.—They pray for the extension and stability of her borders—the increase of her converts—and the unity and progression of her members, Hab. iii. 2; Eph. iii. 14—21; Phil. i. 9—11. Many such prayers have been offered by the pious, for the church of Christ in all ages, Ps. cxviii. 25; Isa. lxii. 67; Rom. xiii. 15.

3. *We should pray for the world.* We are commanded to "love our neighbors as ourselves," and "pray for our enemies;" even for those who "despitefully use and persecute us," Matt. v. 44. The Lord assures us that he will "give his Son the heathen for his inheritance," &c.; and that "the earth shall be filled with the knowledge and glory of his name," Ps. ii. 8; Isa. xi. 9; Jer. xxxi. 34. Encouraged by such declarations, we should "pray for all men; for kings, and for all that are in authority;"—for the universal dissemination of divine truth—and the glorious triumphs of the Redeemer's kingdom, in every nation, kindred, tongue, and people, Ps. xliii. 3; Isa. lxii. 1; Matt. vi. 10; Rev. xi. 15. If such are the the blessings for which we should inquire, we may observe,

II. THE MANNER HOW WE SHOULD INQUIRE FOR THEM. This is highly necessary, both for our instruction and encouragement. And for the proper discharge of this important duty the Scriptures furnish every needful direction, by which we are explicitly taught to inquire of the Lord.

1. *In the method which he appoints.* We cannot approach unto him acceptably, but through Jesus Christ, who is the high priest over the house of God for ever, John xiv. 6; Heb. vii. 17. He has sprinkled the mercy seat with his own precious blood, and "now appears in the presence of God for us." Through his mediation, under the influence of the Holy Ghost, we have constant boldness of access to the throne of grace, Rom. viii. 26, 27; Eph. ii. 18. This is the new and living way, which is divinely consecrated for mankind, to the "Father of mercies," Heb. iv. 14—16, chap. x. 19—22.

2. *With devout dispositions of mind.* The Lord looks at the heart, and when we enter into holy converse with him, we should inquire for the blessings of salvation *sincerely*, without hypocrisy, Matt. xv. 8; *humbly*, with reverence and godly fear, Ps. lxxxix. 7; *fervently*, with holy ardor, Gen. xxxii. 26;—*affectionately*, with hearts filled with love to God, and good-

will to all mankind, Matt. vi. 14, 15; and *believingly*, in the lively exercise of faith, Matt. xxi. 22; 1 John v. 14, 15.

3. *In every situation of human life.* Whatever stations we occupy, or however different the circumstances in which we are placed, prayer is indispensably necessary. In private retirement, Matt. vi. 6;—in our families, Joshua xxiv. 15;—in the public ordinances of the gospel, Ps. xxvii. 4;—and in our daily occupations, we should “pray always, with all prayer, and every where, lifting up holy hands without wrath and doubting,” Eph. vi. 18; 1 Tim. ii. 8.

4. *With diligent perseverance unto death.* We are invariably dependent on God, and continually need his special direction and blessing, as sinful and helpless creatures. Without him we can do nothing; and though he has promised every needful benefit, yet for all these things he will be inquired of to do them for us. And hence, we ought to “pray without ceasing, and in every thing give thanks,” Rom. xii. 12. And in this sacred exercise, we shall be greatly encouraged by considering,

III. THE REASONS WHY WE SHOULD INQUIRE OF THE LORD. These are various; but we select the following only:

1. *Prayer is an ordinance of divine authority.* If it should be said, Why inquire of the Lord who knows our wants, and is ever ready to do us good? the text affords an appropriate answer to all such vain objections;—“*Thus saith the Lord God,*” &c. Every duty which is distinctly revealed and divinely enjoined, is unquestionable in its authority, and imperious in its claims. Now this is certainly the case in reference to prayer. The Lord commands us to pray, Ps. v. 14, 15; Jer. xxix. 12; Luke xviii. 1;—he promises to hear and answer prayer, Ps. xci. 15, 16;—and he directs us how to pray, Matt. vi. 9—13.—If therefore we restrain prayer before him, we impeach his wisdom, despise his authority, and reject his ordinance, Job xxi. 14, 15.

2. *Prayer evinces the dependence of the creature on the Creator.* It powerfully reminds us of our own insufficiency, and the all-sufficiency of the Almighty, 2 Cor. iii. 5.—We feel innumerable wants which we cannot supply but we are taught to “ask and receive, that our joy may be full.” We thus at once discover our utter indigence and dependence as finite beings, and the absolute necessity of praying to, and “trusting in the Lord Jehovah, in whom is everlasting strength.”

3. *Prayer demonstrates the connection between duty and interest.* As intellectual beings, we are capable of moral actions and spiritual enjoyments. The Lord is therefore pleased to suspend the blessings he promises, on the performance of the duties he enjoins; and it is only by complying with the latter, that we can realize the former, Ps. xxxiv. 17; Jer. xxxiii. 3. This inseparable connection admirably displays the wisdom and goodness of God in the salvation of his people.

We may conclude by warning the prayerless of their danger,—and encouraging the devout to “continue instant in prayer.”

PERSEVERANCE AND WATCHFULNESS IN PRAYER.

Eph. vi. 18.—Praying always with all prayer, &c. (H.)

THE believing Ephesians are here taught by the apostle what they have to expect in this world; nothing less than a constant warfare, and that too with no common enemy, as may be seen by the description given, verse 12. He would not have them, however, be discouraged by the view of either the multitude or the strength of their opposers, nor yet to trust in the least degree to their own wisdom and strength, verse 10, when christians can do this, in the exercise of a strong faith, they may despise all the efforts of their most potent and malignant foe, and exult in the beautiful language of the apostle, "If God be for us," &c.

To manage the arduous conflict with success, it is requisite we should put on "the whole armor," verse 13, which the apostle describes; and then he introduces the words of my text: "Praying always," &c. intimating, that it was not enough to be duly apprized of the nature and strength of the enemy, and to have on the armor of defence ready for the attack; but even then there must be much and constant prayer to God for wisdom, courage, and ability, to persevere in the conflict; for having once entered the field under Jesus, the Captain of our salvation, we must never think of obtaining peace, or putting off our armor, till we have reached the blissful shores of our heavenly Canaan, and can join in that delightful triumph of the church, Rev. xii. 10, 11. In our text the apostle directs the Ephesians—

I. TO PRAY WITH ALL PRAYER.—What is the import of this expression? It may be considered under two ideas.

There are divers kinds of prayer. They are all important; none of them can be slighted with propriety by the real christian. They occupy distinct and separate stations in the good man's general sphere of action, and it should be his care to keep them from clashing one with the other. As in a well-constructed piece of mechanism every wheel and every pin has its proper station, and performs its office in a regular manner, all operating to the production of one grand effect; so it is in religion. 1 Cor. xiv. 33. We are not to be at home engaging in private prayer, when duty calls us to public prayer, &c. It is natural to infer, from the view we have been taking of prayer, what a burden religion must be to a worldly man. With the real christian it is exactly the reverse: he can say with truth, that the service of his God "is perfect freedom."

Prayer is composed of a variety of parts. Some arrange these under a smaller, and some under a larger number of particulars. From the examples of prayer which we have in the old testament, and also from the manner in which Christ taught his disciples to pray, I am led to divide the parts of prayer into—Adoration, Confession, Petition, and Thanksgiving.

1. When we approach God in prayer, it should be with sentiments of profound veneration: he is the infinitely great and eternal God, and we are creatures but of yesterday: he is the holy and righteous God, and we sinners by nature and by practice. If then we know who and what God is, when we come near to his throne we shall adore and worship him in the most humble manner. A view of his majesty and greatness will penetrate our souls with godly fear, and a sense of the riches of his mercy will inspire us with trust and confidence. Our souls will feel much of that temper which is manifested in the language of Nebuchadnezzar, Dan. iv. 34, 35.

2. Another part of prayer is *confession*. The deep depravity of our nature, Jer. xvii. 9, and the numberless sins which proceed from that corrupt source, furnish abundant matter for this part of prayer. The fifty-first Psalm, the language of the returning prodigal, and of the publican who went into the temple to pray, are among the finest examples of genuine confession—of that kind of confession which the scriptures connect with salvation, inasmuch as it is said, “If we confess our sins,” &c. 1 John i. 9.

3. The next branch of true prayer is *petition*. Man is an indigent creature in every respect, and can never be addressed in a more suitable language than Rev. iii. 17. He is, therefore, in himself the most forlorn and dependent creature; but it is only the christian who sees and feels, and, consequently, acts in conformity to this humbling truth; he comes as a beggar to the door of mercy.

4. The last branch of prayer is *thanksgiving* and *praise*. This is mentioned in a very distinct manner by the apostle. Phil. iv. 6. This branch of the subject may be divided into two parts. In the first there is a particular and direct acknowledgment made to God for the mercies received. We may illustrate this point by the language of David, Ps. ciii. 2, 3. The other branch of thanksgiving is more general. We have examples of this in Matt. vi. 13; Jude 24, 25.

II. IN THIS TEXT THE APOSTLE RECOMMENDS “PRAYING ALWAYS;” every work of the good man’s hand should be prefaced, accompanied with, and followed by prayer. Acts vi. 4; 1 Thess. iii. 10.

In this part of the subject I shall particularly urge upon you constancy and perseverance in prayer.

1. To you who have in past times bowed your knee to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, and now live prayerless, we say, “Ye did run well, who did hinder you.” Gal. v. 7. Such persons may be thus addressed, “Thou castest off fear.” Job xv. 4. The Jews were an awful instance of this, as appears by Ps. lxxviii. 34—37.

The temporary and short-lived nature of the disposition of some men to pray, may be seen in the case of affrighted mariners, whose distress and conduct, when in danger of shipwreck, is beautifully described, Ps. cvii. 23—30. But no sooner is the storm ended, and they find themselves in safety, than they utterly forget the God on whom they called.

Such also is the prayer of the man who is affrighted by the grand and awful representations which the Almighty is pleased sometimes to make of himself in earthquakes, inundations, yea, even in ordinary storms of thunder and lightning.

Again, The subject is illustrated by the prayers of the sick man, who, while his recovery is yet doubtful, is constant and devout in his supplications: but all his devotions evaporate on the first symptom of returning health; to such persons may be applied the words of our Lord, Matt. xii. 45.

We address this part of our subject to backsliders in general. You, in times past, sought God by prayer, not only in the public assembly of his saints, but also in your closet; but now you have lost all the good impressions you once had, though, like Felix, whilst the preacher reasoned of righteousness, &c. Acts xxiv. 25. Though, like Herod, you heard the word gladly; and did many things, Mark vi. 20, yet now you set truth and conscience at defiance. If this is your character, what are you better than an apostate? How awful is your state! How justly may the words of scripture be applied to you! 2 Pet. ii. 21, 22.

2. I come now to urge constancy and perseverance in prayer on those christians who are often tempted to leave it off. The scriptures would not have abounded with such exhortations as 1 Thess. v. 16; Rom. xii. 12, where it not that the soul is liable to be discouraged by difficulties and temptations.

Sometimes they are tempted to this by their want of liberty and enlargement in prayer:—others are discouraged in prayer, because they feel so many short comings and imperfections in their prayers. You forget, christian, too much and too often, that your prayers do pass through the hands of Jesus Christ, and are perfumed with the incense of his merit: Rev. viii. 3, 4, others are tempted to give up seeking the Lord by prayer, because he delays to answer them. These are often crying out, Lam. iii. 44; Hab. i. 2. Yet remember, Hab. ii. 3. We have also many striking instances, in which the Lord has kept his people long praying and waiting, before he has vouchsafed to say, “Be it unto thee even as thou wilt.” David relates his own experience, Ps. xl. 1—3. And it is also related of Abraham, Heb. vi. 15.—See Rom. viii. 24, 25; and James v. 7, 8. Be not, then, christian, discouraged by not receiving an immediate answer to your petitions: go on praying; the Lord is not slack concerning his promises:—and you have abundant proof, that “praying breath is never spent in vain.”

III. OUR TEXT RECOMMENDS WATCHING UNTO PRAYER; the nearness and importance of the connexion between prayer and watching is plain, by the frequency of those passages in which they are jointly recommended to the christian, Luke xxi. 36; Col. iv. 2; 1 Pet. iv. 7. This apostle knew, by fatal experience, the vast importance of what he here recommended. It has been exemplified in the experience and practice of the saints. Neh. iv. 9.

1. The christian should watch for opportunities to pray, or he will but seldom find them.

2. In prayer we should watch over our own hearts, which are so deceitful and unstable. Prov. iv. 23.

3. Watch against hinderances to stated seasons of prayer. We are in danger of this from many sources.

4. Watch against intruders which would disturb you while exercising in prayer. If it is your desire to “attend upon the Lord without distraction,” you must be constant and diligent in this duty. Gen. xv. 11.

5. Watch against the great enemy of souls, who is ever going about either to destroy them, or to disturb them in their religious exercises, which instrumentally subserve their eternal salvation. Job i. 6; Zech. iii. 1.

6. Watch for an answer to prayer. Too many, when they have finished prayer, rise up and go their way, and think no more about the matter. Not so the good man; he, like David, will not only say, “Show us thy mercy, O Lord, and grant us thy salvation:” but he will add, “I will hear what God the Lord will speak.” &c. (Compare 1 King xviii. 1. 41—46, with James v. 17, 18.) So let us be looking and watching for an answer to prayer.

IV. CHRISTIANS SHOULD PRAY IN OR WITH THE SPIRIT. Praying “in the Spirit,” either means praying under the influence of the Holy Ghost, or with divine fervor.

In speaking of divine fervor in prayer, I notice,

1. That it is urged by a variety of scriptures in which prayer is spoken of, all of which imply an earnest and vigorous exercise of the mind. To pray is to “pour out” the heart, Ps. lxii. 8; to “wrestle with God,” Gen. xxxii. 24; to “cry,” Ps. ix. 12; to “sigh and groan,” Ps. xii. 5; to

"strive," Rom. xv. 30 ; to "give God no rest," Is. lxii. 7 ; and in the text, it is "supplication in the Spirit." In all these places we are taught that true prayer is very fervent and importunate.

2. Earnestness and fervor in prayer may be urged by the consideration of the value of the blessings for which we pray ; nothing less than "grace and glory."

3. We may take an argument to be fervent in prayer from the arduous nature of the conflict in which we are engaged.

4. Fervency in prayer is recommended by examples recorded in the word of God. Gen. xxxii. 26. 28. We have also a striking example of fervent prayer in the woman who came to our Lord, Matt. xv. 22 ; Luke xxii. 44.

V. WHEN A CHRISTIAN MAINTAINS A LIFE OF PRAYER ACCORDING TO THE DIRECTIONS GIVEN IN THIS TEXT, it will produce a very advantageous influence upon his spiritual warfare, and assist him in the use of the armor which God hath provided.

1. By thus exercising ourselves in prayer we shall *stand* firm in the day of battle. He that is much with God in prayer, stands not only on even, but on elevated ground, and must ultimately have the advantage.

2. Praying always with all prayer has a tendency to inspire the soul with *courage* in this arduous conflict. Living near to God in prayer makes the soul as bold as a lion ; hence Elisha, who was a man of much prayer, when his house was surrounded by a host, was enabled to say to his servant, "Fear not." 2 Kings vi. 6.

3. They who pray always, and with all prayer, will be *skilful* and *active* in the use of the christian armor.

4. Abounding in prayer has a tendency to keep our armor bright and fit for use ; yea, it gives the christian soldier a promptness for action. By the means of prayer, the girdle of truth and the breastplate of righteousness are girded on tight ; the helmet of hope, and the shoes of peace, fit well, and become proof against the most furious assaults ; and the shield of faith, and the sword of the Spirit, are grasped with a firm hand, and are wielded with energy.

5. It is by fervent and persevering prayer that the believer finally obtains the victory in every conflict. Whilst we cleave to the Lord with purpose of heart, and watch in prayer, satan gains little or no advantage over us -- To conclude,

1. Are we engaged in this holy warfare, with the description of which our text is connected ? we shall not "endure hardness, as good soldiers" 2 Tim. ii. 3, but as we pray always and with all prayer.

2. What an awful state is yours, who have been induced to commence a life of prayer, either through the pressure of adverse providences, or the temporary alarms of your consciences, and have fallen back into a state of total indifference and irreligion. Isa. xxvi. 16. Ah, thoughtless sinner ! thou wilt be in trouble again, and then with what face wilt thou return to a throne of grace.

Our last reflection is for the comfort and encouragement of God's praying people : keep on in the holy exercise : exemplify that sentence, "faint, yet pursuing." Let thy soul be animated with the pleasing thought, that Christ prays for thee, and the Holy Spirit makes intercession within thee. Through all the changes of the christian life, be this thy constant practice, "Praying always with all prayer," &c.

THE DUTY OF PERSEVERING IN PRAYER.

Luke xviii. 1.—Men ought always to pray, and not to faint. (S. S.)

THE efficacy of prayer is continually exhibited in the sacred writings—
And every incitement to it is afforded us—

Nevertheless we are prone to faint in the performance of it—

To encourage our perseverance in it our Lord delivered a parable—

Waving all notice of the parable itself, we shall consider,

I. OUR DUTY.

To be always in the act of prayer would interfere with other duties—

That which is here inculcated, implies that we pray —

Statedly.

Regular seasons for prayer should be fixed—

Except in cases of absolute necessity, Matt. ix. 13, they should be adhered to—

We should constantly acknowledge God *in the public assembly*, Heb. x. 25.

We should maintain his worship also *in our families**

Nor should we on any account omit it *in our closets*†—

Occasionally.

There are many particular occasions which require us to pray—

Prosperity, that God may counteract its evil tendency, Prov. xxx. 9.

Adversity, that we may be supported under it, James v. 13.

Times of *public distress or danger*, to avert the calamity, 2 Chron. vii.

14.

Habitually.

We should maintain a spiritual frame of mind—

We may have a disposition for prayer in the midst of business—

Nor will secret ejaculations prevail less than solemn devotions‡—

To pray thus is our duty; “We ought,” &c.

It is a duty we owe to God.

He, our Creator, Preserver, and Redeemer, has commanded it—

Nor can anything absolve us from our obligation to obey—

We owe it also to our neighbor.

The edification of Christ’s mystical body depends, not only on the union of every part with the head, but on the whole being fitly framed together, and on every joint supplying its proper nourishment, Eph. iv. 16; Col. ii. 19.

But if we be remiss in prayer, we shall be incapable of administering that benefit, which other members have a right to expect from us||—

We owe it to ourselves.

A “spirit of supplication” is as necessary to the soul, as food to the body—

* Abraham and Joshua were noted for their attention to family religion: Gen. xviii. 19; Josh. xxiv. 15, and our Lord’s example is worthy of imitation; he not only expounded his parables to his disciples in private, but prayed with them. See Luke ix. 18, which means, “he was at a distance from the multitude, and praying with his disciples.”

† How frequent the stated seasons shall be, must be left to our own discretion, David’s example is good, Ps. lv. 17. But as the morning and evening sacrifices were called the continual burnt-offering, so they may be said to pray *always* who pray at those returning seasons.

‡ Compare 2 Sam. xv. 31, with 2 Sam. xvii. 14, 23. See also Neh. ii. 4, 6.

|| Samuel had a deep conviction of this truth; 1 Sam. xii. 23.

Nor can we feel any regard for our souls, if we do not cultivate it—
It is, however, by no means easy to fulfil this duty.

II. THE DIFFICULTIES THAT ATTEND IT.

When we set ourselves to the performance of it, we shall find difficulties—
Before we begin to pray.

Worldly business may indispose our minds for this employment—

Family cares may distract and dissipate our thoughts—

Lassitude of body may unfit us for the necessary exertions—

We may be disabled by an invincible *hardness of heart*—

A *want of utterance* may also operate as a heavy discouragement—

By these means many are tempted to defer their religious exercises—

But to yield to the temptation is to increase the difficulty—

While we are engaged in prayer.

The *world* is never more troublesome than at such seasons—

Something seen or heard, lost or gained, done or to be done, will general-
ly obtrude itself upon us when we are at the throne of grace—

The *flesh* also, with its vilest imaginations, will solicit our attention—

Nor will *satan* be backward to interrupt our devotions*—

After we have concluded prayer.

When we have prayed, we should expect an answer—

But *worldliness* may again induce a forgetfulness of God—

Impatience to receive the desired blessings may deject us—

Ignorance of the method in which God answers prayer may cause us to
disquiet ourselves with many ungrounded apprehensions—

Unbelief may rob us of the benefits we might have received, James i.
6, 7.

Whatever obstructs God's answers to prayer, disqualifies us for the future
discharge of that duty—

APPLICATION.

Let us not expect victory without many conflicts—

Let us remember the effect of perseverance in the case of Moses, Exodus
xvii. 11—13.

Above all let us attend to the parable spoken for this end, Luke xvii. 2—8.

So shall we be kept from fainting under our discouragements—

And God will fulfil to us his own promise, Gal. vi. 9.

*He has various devices whereby he strives to accomplish his purpose. He will suggest
"it is needless to pray:" or, "it is presumption for so great a sinner to ask any thing of
God:" or, "it is hypocrisy to ask, when the heart is so little engaged." Sometimes he
will inject into the christian's mind the most blasphemous and horrid thoughts; and at
other times tempt him to admire his own fluency and enlargement in prayer. Such are
the "fiery darts" with which he often assails the soul, Eph. vi. 16.

LOOKING TO CHRIST INSEPARABLY CONNECTED WITH SALVATION.

Isa. xlv. 22.—Look unto me, and be ye saved, &c. (H.)

By grace ye are saved. Eph. ii. 8. Now that faith, which is the instrumental cause of our salvation, is spoken of, in the sacred scriptures, by various metaphorical expressions: sometimes it is borrowed from earthly things, and particularly from the actions of the body. Matt. xi. 28; Isa. lv. 1; Rev. xxii. 17. Or, as the manslayer, being closely pursued, &c. Heb. vi. 18.—Sometimes from the conduct of a dutiful and loyal people towards their royal sovereign, upon his entering among them, in his own territories. John i. 11, 12.—Sometimes the metaphor is taken from the ear; and faith is expressed by hearing his voice, as an impoverished, dying wretch, would hear of plenty and life. Isa. lv. 3. And sometimes the metaphor is taken from the eye, as in the text, and faith is represented as looking to Christ.

I. EXPLAIN THE DUTY HERE EXPRESSED BY THE METAPHOR OF LOOKING.

We are to observe, in general, that a man's looks often indicate his condition and frame of mind. By virtue of that strange union between the soul and the body, the dispositions of the one are often discovered by the emotion and appearance of the other. The eye, in particular, is a mirror, in which we may see the various passions of the mind; and is a kind of silent, yet significant language, that conveys to others those inward exercises which the tongue does not, or perhaps cannot express: hence we can understand a look of sorrow and compassion, a look of joy, and the look of a perishing supplicant. If an agonizing patient casts an eager look upon his physician, he understands it to be a silent petition for relief. When a dying husband fixes a wishful, tender look, upon his surviving half, and those other selves, his children, they know the melting language, and feel its resistless energy. And when a drowning man casts a wild and eager look towards a boat coming to his relief, we understand it to be the language of earnest importunity for speedy help.

Hence it follows, that looking to Christ implies those suitable dispositions and exercises of heart towards him, which are expressed by the earnest and significant looks of persons in a distressed condition towards their deliverer.

And, in such a case, it is natural to conceive a person expressing, by his looks, a particular and distinct knowledge, of his deliverer—an importunate cry for his assistance—a wishful expectation of it—an humble dependence on him for it—a universal submission to him—a hearty love and approbation of him—a joy and gratitude for his deliverance.

And these dispositions and exercises of mind towards Christ, I presume, are intended in the text by looking to him.

1. Looking to Christ implies a particular notice and distinct knowledge of him. John xvii. 3; Isa. liii. 11; xxvii. 11; Hosea iv. 6; 2 Cor. iii. 18.

2. Looking to Christ implies an importunate eagerness for relief from him. Ps. xxv. 15. As a child falling into the hands of a murderer, on the sight of a parent coming to its help, so are we desired to look to Christ: this implies a sense of our need of him. Ps. cxxi. 1; Jonah ii. 4; John iii. 14, 15.

3. Looking to Christ implies a wishful expectation of deliverance from him. Isa. xvii. 7; Ps. cxxx. 6; Acts iii. 4, 5; Matt. xv. 22, 28.

4. Looking to Christ implies an humble dependence upon him for salva-

tion. This supposes a deep sense of our own utter inability; then we see no ground for self-confidence, when we shall place our trust in Christ alone: 2 Chron. xx. 12; Micah vii. 7. John xiii. 15.

5. Looking to Christ means a universal, cheerful submission to his authority. Ps. cxliii. 1, 2.

6. Looking to Christ implies our hearty approbation of him as a Saviour. Love is often expressed by a look. 2 Sam. xxiii. 5.

7. Looking to Christ implies joy and gratitude. Ps. ciii. 1, 2.

II. URGE THE DUTY BY SEVERAL WEIGHTY CONSIDERATIONS.

It is the duty of saints and sinners, in all ages and places, to the end of the world; and the arguments to enforce it can never be exhausted; those in this copious text are sufficient.

1. It is salvation that is offered. "Look and be saved."

2. This salvation may be obtained upon low terms; it may be obtained by a look. "Look and be saved."

3. It is Immanuel, our incarnate God, that invites and commands us to look to him and be saved. We may trifle with the commands of a usurper, and reject the treacherous invitations of an enemy; but dare we trifle with the injunctions, dare we refuse the gracious invitations of our supreme Lord and heavenly King? Rom. xiv. 9. 11; Phil. ii. 9. 11.

4. It is Immanuel we are to look unto. "Look unto me." He is the glorious, attractive object we are called to behold. Ps. lxix. 20; cxlii. 4. And looking will not be in vain; for,

5. He is able to save us, upon our looking to him. "Look unto me and be saved, for I am God." And who can give us greater security of salvation? "If God be for us, who can be against us?"

6. Look unto him, for he is God, and there is none else. This implies that there is salvation in no other. Job. v. 1.

And lastly, We must look unto him, or drop into hell. Look to him! For we are particularly invited, being especially meant by the "ends of the earth." Therefore, "Look unto him and be saved all ye ends of the earth;" more especially backsliders, sensible sinners, &c

NOAH'S OBEDIENCE.

Genesis vi. 22.—Thus did Noah; according to all that God commanded him so did he. (Sk.)

BIOGRAPHICAL researches are peculiarly interesting.—They teach us to form a proper estimate of mankind, and the various features in the human character; they convey correct ideas of the strong and capacious powers of the soul, and are eminently calculated to inspire us with a noble ambition to follow the most worthy and renowned of our species. There are some men, however, whose characters excite a more than common interest in our minds, especially those who have lived in a remarkable era of the world—who have accomplished some mighty achievement—and whose designs have met with the peculiar sanction of heaven: such was the subject of our text, Noah;—a man who witnessed the most desolating scourge which ever visited the world—who brought to perfection one of the most stupendous

pieces of mechanism that was ever reared by human hands—and whose life was preserved as a reward for his obedience.

The text contains a high commendation of his character.—“Thus did Noah,” &c. We will consider,

I. THE RULE OF NOAH’S OBEDIENCE, “All that God commanded.” Mankind need a rule for their conduct. This rule should possess the following characteristics:—

1. *It should come forth from God, and have the Divine sanction.* No man can be a rule to himself; as he did not produce himself, is not dependent on himself, nor solely accountable to himself. No man can be an absolute rule for another; for all men are defectible, and subject to mutation: but a rule for human manners and conduct, should be perfect and immutable. The commandments found in the Bible, are God’s commandments. The men who wrote them received them from God: some orally, others by inspiration; “God said to Noah,” verse 13. The prophets prefaced their messages, by declaring, “Thus saith the Lord.”

2. *It should be practical in its requirements.* A rule whose demands are impossible to be observed, is a contradiction. God’s commandments are all practicable. He is not a hard Master: “His yoke is easy, and his burden is light.” “His commandments are not grievous.” But we must not judge of their practicability by the infirmities of our flesh; or the weakness of our reason; but by the power of God—the energies of grace—and the attainments of the saints. God charged Noah to build the ark; had human reason been consulted he would never have made the attempt.

3. *It should be plain and circumstantial in its phraseology.*—No man can act according to a rule which he does not understand. God’s commandments are easily comprehended. The Bible may present mysterious things, and things inexplicable; but there is no precept mysterious, no commandment abstruse. Read the charge to Noah in the preceding verses, examine the commandments of God generally, plainness and perspicuity are their uniform characteristics.

4. *It should be beneficial in its results.* Human nature revolts at the idea of living by a rule which does not bear upon our personal interest. God never has laid, nor ever will lay, an injunction upon a human being which militates against his own happiness. God’s commandments are the emanations of his love, and the welfare of mankind is their ultimate object; the precepts given to Noah serve to illustrate this. See Psalm xix. 11; Rev. xxii. 14.

II. THE NATURE OF NOAH’S OBEDIENCE. “According to all that God commanded him, so did he.”

1. *Noah’s obedience was pious in its principle.* Actions are the result of principles. The tree must be made good, before the fruit can be good. To suppose that a man will obey God, whose heart is not right before him, is a palpable absurdity. “Noah found grace in the eyes of the Lord.” “Noah was a just man, and perfect in his generations, and Noah walked with God.” Oh, how vain are all attempts to obey God without loving him!

2. *Noah’s obedience was prompt and decided in its acts.* No sooner does the inspired writer close the account of the Divine admonition to Noah, than he immediately adds, “Thus did Noah;” Heb. xi. 7. It is said, he was “moved by fear;” and fear is always prompt in its acts. There is too commonly a culpable reluctance in our obedience, especially when the cross

res in the way; but, like David, we should make haste, and delay not to keep God's commandments, Psalm cxix. 60.

3. *Noah's obedience was laborious in its exercise.* To build an ark, not less than five hundred and twelve feet long, eighty-seven wide, and fifty-two high, and the interior capacity of which, according to Calmet, was 357,600 cubical cubits, was a prodigious undertaking, and required immense labor; the labor of the head to contrive, and the hands to accomplish. And does not our obedience to God require labor? Read Matt. xi. 12; John vi. 27; Heb. iv. 11. Is there no labor required in making the sacrifices which God demands;—in exercising the graces which he approves;—and in performing the duties that he requires? Here must be the exercise of the understanding, to know the commandments of God; of the will to submit to their authority; and of the faculties of the mind, and members of the body, to practise them.

4. *Noah's obedience was universal in its extent.* He did "according to all that God commanded him." A failure of the most trivial kind would have defeated his whole design; and endangered his own life, and the lives of all who were with him in the ark. His obedience was therefore exact, and he was attentive to do all that God commanded him. Oh, what a pattern for us to follow! Our obedience should be as broad as the commandment, James ii. 10.

5. *Noah's obedience was persevering in its course.* Impediments were most certainly thrown in his way. Were there no doubts that assailed his mind as to the possibility of the scheme? Were there no insults heaped upon him? Were there no temptations to relinquish the undertaking, during the long period of a hundred and twenty years? But Noah, not only began and continued, but finished his undertaking. We also shall have obstacles to meet with, in the course of our obedience; but we must persevere, hold on, and finish our course with joy, Matt. xxiv. 13.

6. *Noah's obedience was successful in its object.* The end crowned the action. His life was preserved as the reward of his toils and labors, and persevering efforts. See him shut up in the ark, secure in Divine protection, a world of water around him, millions of dead floating on its surface, the dwellings of men for ever demolished, and nature all in ruins.

Learn from the subject,

1. What terrible desolations sin makes in the world, and how the severity of God was displayed in making the very elements conspire to the destruction of those who had slighted the Divine counsels.

2. How tenderly God cares for his servants, and how easily he can provide means for their safety.

3. How much human security depends upon human exertion. The way of duty is the way of safety. Had Noah dared to disobey God, he would have perished in the flood. "Blessed are they that do his commandments"

SOBRIETY.

1 Thess. v. 6.—Let us be sober. (Sk.)

In the context the apostle exhorts the converts at Thessalonica to a variety of Christian duties, personal and relative, suitable to their state and privileges as Christians in general, and to their belief and expectation of Christ's second coming to judgment in particular. One of these personal duties we have in the text—*sobriety*; and as the apostle deemed it requisite to urge this on the attention and practice of one of the primitive churches, it is no less applicable to Christian ministers and people in the present day. In speaking of this duty, we shall describe,

I. THE VIRTUE OF SOBRIETY.

1. *This virtue has a principal regard to a man's self, and is equally adapted to persons of all ranks, characters, ages and sexes.* Speaking generally, it consists in observing those rules, and walking according to those methods, whereby they may secure and preserve their own health, ease, and reputation: it is to keep within those bounds which God has fixed for the right government of ourselves, our appetites, and passions, avoiding all inordinary excesses.

2. *Sobriety relates to the whole man, body and mind.* As to the mind, it bounds and moderates our thoughts of ourselves, and enjoins us to take the measure of our own worth from what we have received from God, and not from any opinion that others may entertain or express of us. It requires that we have a low and modest opinion of ourselves, and guards us against pride, self-conceit, haughtiness, vain glory, and ostentation. We are not to have an overweening conceit of our own abilities, not to contemn others, not to be insolent or imperious, not to stretch ourselves beyond our line. In this sense of the word *sobriety*, the apostle recommends to every man among the Christians at Rome, "not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but to think soberly, according as God hath dealt to every man the measure of faith," Rom. xii. 3.

3. *As to the body, it consists in a regular and moderate desire, pursuit, and use of sensible enjoyments, such as are allowed for the promotion of its health and sustenance.* The correct notion of sobriety lies in neither denying the body what is useful and proper for it, as God is pleased to bless us with the necessities and comforts of life; nor going beyond our necessities and stations, merely to gratify a sensual appetite, or, as the apostle expresses it, "using the world as not abusing it," 1 Cor. vii. 31.

4. *The apostle in the text considers the word in a more restrained sense, relating only to the use of meats and drinks, in opposition to gluttony and drunkenness.* I think it is evident from the context that this is his meaning; for immediately after the text, he adds, "They that sleep, sleep in the night; and they that be drunken, are drunken in the night: but let us, who are of the day, be sober." As if he should say, The heathen, with whom is the night or moral darkness, who want the cheering light of the gospel of Christ, indulge themselves in riot and excess: but let us Christians, who are of the day, enjoying the luminous rays of evangelical truth, be sober, for that is one of the rudiments it teaches, Tit. ii. 12.

5. *So that to be sober, in a limited point of view, is to use meats and drinks moderately, and for the purposes for which the almighty Donor bestows them.* The chief design of which is to render us capable of performing the duties of religion, as well as those of civil and domestic life, and do-

ing good to others according to our ability, means, and opportunity. We should, therefore, use the gifts of divine Providence, so as neither our reason nor health may be injured by them. To be sober, is to keep a strict and constant guard on our appetite, that we neither offend by a luxurious costliness in the quality, or excess in the quantity of those blessings granted for the nourishment and support of the earthly frame. To this purpose are the words of Solomon, when tempting dainties are set before us; "When thou sittest to eat with a ruler, consider diligently what is before thee: and put a knife to thy throat, if thou be a man given to appetite. Be not desirous of his dainties: for they are deceitful meat," Prov. xxiii. 1—3. Also he says, "Look thou not upon the wine when it is red, when it giveth his color in the cup, when it moveth itself aright. At the last it biteth like a serpent, and stingeth like an adder," ver. 31, 32.

II. PRODUCE SOME REASONS TO ENFORCE THE PRACTICE OF IT.

1. *It is amiable and commendable.* A man governing himself by the rules of temperance, checking his sensual appetite, restraining his inclination, especially when in the midst of plenty and affluence, is a character of peculiar interest. Such a person fills his station in life with credit to himself, and answers the design of God, in giving him reason to be the guide and director of his actions. How gratifying it is to behold a man whom providence has favored with the means of procuring whatever his heart may desire, habitually to deny himself, subdue wrong propensities, limit and restrain himself to what is consistent with and conducive to his health and support, without any excess. He that thus gains a conquest over himself, deserves a higher encomium than he that conquers a city or country. "He that ruleth his spirit, is better than he that taketh a city," Prov. xvi. 32. The conquest of ourselves is more glorious; for one gained by reason, is more noble to an intellectual creature than one gained by force.

2. *The contrary vices are odious and full of deformity.* In their progress they dethrone reason, and reduce the man to a level even with the brute. Reason is the glory of human nature, by which we are distinguished from animals, in the right use of which we are enabled to conduct ourselves with reputation and benefit; but to hurl this noble power from her legitimate seat, by giving heed to the demands of a low craving appetite, is the highest reproach.

Historians inform us, that the Lacedæmonians, in order to fortify their children against intemperate habits, exposed their slaves when in a state of intoxication, to their contempt and derision. And really, if a drunkard would but conceive the ridiculous figure he makes, either as staggering along the streets, or disgorging his nauseous load, or stunning the company with noise and impertinence, he would not be in charity with himself till he had cleared away this worse than brutal conduct by repentance and reformation.

These vices are a gross abuse of providential blessings, perverting them to purposes quite contrary to the intention of the Divine Author in bestowing such favors. They also occasion a serious abuse of precious time, which is dishonorable and disgraceful to a rational creature, who should know better how to value its worth. Life is vastly important, and the opportunities for performing its essential duties are fleeting and uncertain, and, when past, cannot be recalled. It becomes, therefore, a reasonable creature, rather to endeavor to recover lost time, by future attention and diligence, than squander away more, by associating with extravagant company, and indulging in riot and excess. See 1 Pet. iv. 3.

3. *Excess in meats and drinks, is an inlet to all manner of wickedness.*

He who loses the government of himself, and the proper exercise of his understanding, by gluttony and intoxication, what crimes is he not capable of committing, and under the influence of what restraints is he to prevent such conduct? Intemperance is the parent of impurity. "Be not drunk with wine, wherein is excess," Eph. v. 10, or, an unbridled dissolution of manners. It prompts men to injure others, excites to quarrels and contentions, and often leads to immediate destruction. "Who hath wo? who hath sorrow? who hath contentions? who hath babbling? who hath wounds without cause? who hath redness of eyes? They that tarry long at the wine; they that go to seek mixed wine," Prov. xxiii. 29, 30. It opens a way to the commission of the grossest crimes, and therefore Solomon adds, at the 33rd verse, "Thine eyes shall behold strange women, and thine heart shall utter perverse things." In a word, it is fraught with innumerable evils.

4. *A luxurious life produces fatal effects.* It causes the ruin of health and constitution,—human life is shortened by its pernicious influences. The consequences often are, violent inflammation of the blood, the bloated dropsy, the shaking palsy, consumption, fevers, &c., the forerunners of death. Whatever pleasure intemperate persons may pretend to enjoy in gratifying their passions, they will experience bitterness in the end, when the bones are full of the sin of their youth: "And thou mourn at the last, when thy flesh and thy body are consumed," Prov. v. 11. It also ruins the reputation of men, as well as their estate and family affairs. "The drunkard and glutton shall come to poverty," Prov. xxiii. 21. And then, last of all, it ruins the soul, without deep contrition and faith in Christ; for the apostle declares, such "shall not inherit the kingdom of God," 1 Cor. vi. 10. To avoid all this mischief, to which an intemperate indulgence of our sensual appetites exposes us, "let us not sleep, as do others; but let us watch and be sober."

III. SUBJOIN A FEW DIRECTIONS TO THAT END.

1. *Let us consider ourselves as under the all-seeing eye of God.* As David did, set the Lord always before us, knowing that all things are naked and open to his eyes with whom we have to do, Heb. iv. 13; and that he sees through all the like artifices by which we would excuse or cover any irregularities. Did we daily consider this, it would be a happy expedient to prevent all excesses.

2. *Let us secure a saving interest in Christ and carefully keep in view his shining example.* He lived on plain provisions, and always maintained strict temperance both in eating and drinking: he never once exceeded in the least the bounds of regularity. He was sometimes at feasts, being invited, but even then he recommended by his example the doctrine he taught his disciples; "Take heed to yourselves, lest at any time your hearts be overcharged with surfeiting and drunkenness," Luke xxi. 24. Herein, as well as in many other things, he has left us an example, which we should aspire to follow.

3. *Let us avoid as much as possible the society of intemperate persons, and never in one instance choose them for our companions.* "Be not among winebibbers; among riotous eaters of flesh," Prov. xxiii. 20, lest you learn their ways, and insensibly fall into their sins. Bad company in this, as in all other cases, is most pernicious; for those who are contaminated with vice, will endeavor to corrupt others, and triumph in their success.

4. *We must use the greatest caution in those circumstances, where we are in the greatest danger.* One of which is, when we are entertained by our superiors. The honor we are then apt to think done us, and the temptation presented to gratify our appetite, is very likely to make us forget the

snare, and run into excess out of complaisance to the company. We ought, in such a case, to be particularly on our guard, since no pretence of civility to men, however highly distinguished, will justify our breach of the commands of God.

5. *Let us think frequently on the future judgment, and the strict account we must then give of our behaviour to the righteous Judge.* Intemperate persons must give a sad account of their abuse of providential blessings, which they should have received with thanksgiving, and used with moderation. In this particular then, "Let our moderation be known unto all men: The Lord is at hand," Phil. iv. 5.

THE DUTY OF GIVING THE HEART TO GOD.

Prov. xxiii. 26.—My son, give me thy heart. (H. H.)

This address, however it may be considered in some respect as delivered by Solomon to his son, must certainly be understood as proceeding from him who is wisdom in the abstract, wisdom personified, even from the Lord Jesus Christ, Prov. viii. 1, 22—32; and as directed generally to all the children of men, but especially to those who regard him as their sovereign Lord. And though the more immediate object of the address may seem scarcely suited to this view of it, (because those who are possessed even of incipient piety may seem less likely to fall into the snare which is there spoken of,) yet the caution is necessary for youth of all descriptions; and, as a general lesson, it teaches us, that there is no snare whatever into which we may not fall, if our hearts be not given up to God; and that the only sure way of being kept from sin of every kind, is, to give the heart to God.

Taking the words then as addressed by the Lord Jesus Christ to all who acknowledge his paternal authority, we will proceed to mark *the extent and reasonableness of this command.*

I. THE EXTENT OF IT—

To give our heart to God, implies that we give him,

1. The affections of the soul—

Those should all centre in him, and in him alone. Him we should desire as our supreme good, and in him should we delight as our chief joy— — — We should be able to say with David, "Whom have I in heaven but Thee? and there is none upon earth that I desire besides thee." Ps. lxxiii. 25.

2. The confidence of the mind—

If there be any thing besides God in the whole universe, on which we rely, we do not really give our heart to him. To trust, though in ever so small a degree, in an arm of flesh, argues a departure of heart from God. Jer. xvii. 5. We should confide altogether in his wisdom to guide, and his power to uphold us, in his goodness to supply our wants, and his truth to fulfil to us the promises of his word. We should "trust in him with all our heart, and not lean either to our own understanding" or strength: we should consider him as alone able to help us, and as all-sufficient for our utmost necessities.

3. The service of the life—

Without this, all else is vain. Obedience is the certain fruit of love to

God, John xiv. 15, 21; yea, it is altogether identified with it: "This is the love of God, that ye keep his commandments." 1 John ii. 3—5, & v. 3. To the man that has given his heart to God, no commandment can be grievous. *ib.*

The extent of the command being ascertained, we proceed to shew,

II. THE REASONABLENESS OF IT—

To surrender up our whole selves to God, is, called by St. Paul, "a reasonable service." Rom. xii. 1. And reasonable indeed it is;

1. Because of his right over us, as our Creator—

God "made all things for himself: all that we are, and all that we have, was given us by him, to be improved for his glory. How then can we with propriety alienate any thing from him? A potter feels himself entitled to the use of the vessel which his own hands have made: and has not God a right to all the services that we can render him? Of all that have truly given their hearts to God, it may be said, "No man liveth to himself; and no man dieth unto himself: but whether we live, we live unto the Lord; and whether we die, we die unto the Lord: whether we live therefore or die, we are the Lord's." Rom. xiv. 7, 8.

2. Because of his mercies towards us, as our Redeemer—

The Lord Jesus Christ has "redeemed us to God by his own blood;" and by this has acquired a new right over us. To this effect the Apostle says, "Ye are not your own; ye are bought with a price: therefore glorify God with your bodies and your spirits, which are his." 1 Cor. vi. 19, 20. And in another place he gives this as the duty of every man according to the dictates of his most deliberate judgment: "The love of Christ constraineth us, because we thus judge, that, if one died for all, then were all dead; and that he died for all, that they who live should not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto him who died for them, and rose again." 2 Cor. v. 14, 15. Was he mistaken in his judgement? and are we at liberty to alienate from him what he has purchased at so great a price?

3. Because of his relation to us, as our Father—

If we profess to have been born again, and begotten to God by his word and Spirit, then are we yet further bound to him by the relation he sustains towards us: "What manner of love is this, wherewith the Father hath loved us, that we should be called the sons of God?" Can we have learned to cry, Abba, Father, and doubt whether the giving of our hearts to him be a reasonable service? The utmost then we can do to serve and honor him is no more than our bounden duty.

4. Because of the utter worthlessness of all his competitors—

What is there worthy to be compared with him? The whole creation is but as "a broken cistern that can hold no water." Shall we then, "for any thing that is in it, forsake the Fountain of living waters?" Survey the choicest blessings that the world affords; and they are all "vanity and vexation of spirit." Are these then to stand in competition with him who is the unfailing and only source of all blessedness? The more we see the vanity of all created good, the more we shall see the reasonableness of giving our hearts to God alone. We must not only not love our father or mother more than him, but must "*hate* every earthly relative, yea, and our own lives also, *in comparison* of him." Luke xiv. 26.

ADDRESS,

1. In a way of affectionate invitation—

In this view we may take the words of our text, even as an invitation to us from the Lord Jesus Christ to set our affections on him alone. And how

astounding is it that he will accept such hearts as ours! If we of ourselves had presumed to offer them to him, how justly might he have rejected and despised the offering! Yet behold, he solicits it at our hands! And what can such an offering add to him? Does he need any thing from us? or can we add any thing to him? Oh then admire and adore this astonishing condescension; and let him not woo your souls in vain.

2. In a way of authoritative injunction—

This command of Almighty God is not to be trifled with. Let none presume to withstand it, or to delay his obedience to it: for if we obey it not, we never can behold his face in peace. 1 Cor. xvi. 22. Attend to it then; and see that ye obey it in truth. Give not to your God and Saviour a divided heart; for such an offering he will not accept: but give yourselves *wholly* to him; and so shall that promise be fulfilled to you; “I will be a Father unto you, and ye shall be my sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty.”

THE DUTY OF WATCHFULNESS ENFORCED.

Mark xiii. 32—36.—But of that day and that hour knoweth no man, no, not the angels which are in heaven, neither the Son, but the Father. Take ye heed, watch and pray: for ye know not when the time is. For the Son of Man is as a man taking a far journey, who left his house, and gave authority to his servants, and to every man his work, and commanded the porter to watch. Watch ye therefore: for ye know not when the master of the house cometh, at even, or at midnight, or at the cock-crowing, or in the morning; lest coming suddenly he find you sleeping. (H. H.)

On different occasions, but especially at the close of his life, our Lord taught his disciples to look forward to a future period, when he would assuredly come again. He specified two objects for which he would come; the one was, to destroy Jerusalem; and the other, to judge the world: and, inasmuch as the former of these advents was typical of the other, he blended them both together, and thereby raised in them an expectation that they should take place at the same time. The truth is, that though the one was accomplished within forty years, and the other, notwithstanding more than eighteen hundred years have already past, remains yet to be accomplished at some distant and unknown period, they are both equally present in the mind of God, “with whom a thousand years are as one day, and one day as a thousand years:” And it is also true, that the day of death is to every man, *in effect*, as the day of judgment: so that the union of the two periods in their minds, notwithstanding their distance from each other, was strictly just, as it respected God, and highly salutary as it respected them. Not but that our Lord did make a clear distinction between the two periods: for in v. 30, he says, “This generation shall not pass till all *these things* (relative to the destruction of Jerusalem) be done; and then, in a way of contrast, he adds, “But of *that day* and *that hour*, namely, the day of judgment, knoweth no man.” It is in reference to this latter period that he speaks in the words of our text; in discoursing on which we shall consider,

I. THE DUTY INCULCATED—

Watchfulness and prayer are often united in the holy scriptures as duties of the first importance. In themselves they are different; but in their exer-

cise they are inseparable: neither would be of any avail without the other: prayer without watchfulness would be hypocritical; and watchfulness without prayer, presumptuous. We shall therefore combine the duties, as though it had been said. *Watch in the exercise of prayer.* And that we may yet further simplify the subject, we shall not enter into a detail of particulars, but rather follow the general ideas of our text; and shew,

1. What we should watch and pray against—

Here we must include *every thing which has a tendency to lull us asleep.* We see how intent men are on all the things of time and sense: the lust of the eye, and the pride of life, so occupy them, that they find no time nor inclination for spiritual concerns— — —

Against these then we should “watch and pray:” we should watch, to prevent them from gaining an ascendant over our hearts; and cry mightily to God to keep us from yielding to their influence. Seeing how the whole world is led captive by them, we should tremble for ourselves; and day and night intreat God rather to leave us destitute of all earthly things, than to give us over to the love of them, or suffer them to deprive us of eternal happiness— — —

2. What we should watch and pray for.

To be found ready, at whatever moment our Lord shall call for us, should be the one object of our ambition. With this view, we should seek to be found in Christ, not having our own righteousness, but that which is of God through faith in Christ. Not content with a general hope of acceptance through Christ, we should wash our every sin, yea our every duty also, in the fountain of his blood, which must cleanse us from the “iniquity even of our holiest actions. We should seek also to “be renewed in the spirit of our minds,” and to be transformed into “the image of our God in righteousness and true holiness.” No attainments should ever satisfy us: if we were as holy as Paul himself, we should, like him, “forget the things that are behind, and reach forward towards that which is before.” With a view to progressive holiness, we should carefully “abide in Christ,” “living by faith on him,” and receiving daily out of his fulness grace for grace: assured, that without him we can do nothing, but through him shall be enabled to do all things. In a word, we should seek to be ever ready to meet our God; yea to be “looking for, and hasting unto the coming of that day,” when we shall be summoned to his tribunal, and receive our eternal doom— — —

For the attainment of this happy frame of mind, we should be watching our progress in the Divine life, and praying day and night *to God* to perfect in us the work that he has begun— — —

Let us next attend to,

II. THE CONSIDERATIONS WITH WHICH IT IS ENFORCED—

These may be comprehended in the two following:

1. The uncertainty of the time when our Lord shall call us—

The time of the general judgment is unknown to the holy angels: nor was it revealed even to the Messiah himself for the purpose of communicating it to us.* And there was good reason why it should be concealed; because if it had been represented as at a great distance of time, men might have become secure; whereas the idea of its speedy arrival tended to quicken all to holy exertion. In like manner the uncertainty of the time of our

* As God, one with the Father, he knew all things; but as the Mediator, he received his instructions from the Father, and delivered nothing but what he had before received. John xiv. 49. Rev. i. 1.

death has a very salutary effect; since it necessitates us to be always ready. The idea of a man going a long journey, and leaving his servants their appointed work, and ordering them to expect him every moment till they see him, justly illustrates this point. There is not a moment of our lives when we may sit down secure. The night was divided into four watches, which terminated at evening, at midnight, at the cock-crowing, and in the morning. Now at no one of these periods are we sure that we shall not be summoned into the presence of our God.

What a consideration is this to enforce the duty in our text! Who that reflects one moment on the possibility of his being called this night to the judgment-seat of Christ, must not desire to be found in the exercise of watchfulness and prayer?— — —

2. The awfulness of being found in a sleeping state—

In the parable of the ten virgins we are informed what we must assuredly expect, if we indulge in careless security; we shall be shut out from the marriage-supper of our Lord, and be “cast into outer darkness, where is weeping and gnashing of teeth.” It will be to no purpose to plead, that we were not engaged in any wicked projects. We were “slothful servants,” and therefore are justly regarded as “wicked;” we were unprepared, and therefore are justly cut off from all further opportunity to prepare for our great account; we treated heaven with contempt, and therefore we are consigned to the miseries of hell— — —

Who that contemplates these tremendous consequences, must not determine with God’s help to watch and pray through the whole remainder of his days?— — —

Our Lord’s concluding admonition, “What I say unto you I say unto all, Watch,” will lead us to *address* some different descriptions of persons:

1. The old—

Is so much of your time gone, and will you not improve the remainder?— — —

2. The young—

What security have you against death, that you should delay so necessary a work?— — —

3. The afflicted—

God sends your afflictions on purpose to awaken you from your slumbers, and to stir you up to heavenly pursuits: What an aggravation will it be of your guilt, if these dispensations pass away unimproved!

4. The backslidden—

What an awful thing is it, that, instead of having advanced in the Divine life, you have lost in a good measure the life which you once had! Attend to God’s admonition to the church of Sardis, lest he execute upon you the judgment that he threatened to inflict on them, Rev. iii. 2, 3.— — —

5. The more stedfast christian—

Experience proves that the exhortation to “watch” is not less necessary for you than for others. How many who are on the whole pious, grieve, by their unwatchfulness, their Divine Master! Be on your guard against such a slothful way of seeking him as his Bride was found guilty of, Cant. iii. 1; nor think to justify your sloth by such frivolous excuses as were urged by her. Cant. v. 2, 3. If you act like her, like her you will reap the bitter fruits in the hidings of his face. Cant. iii. 1—4. & v. 2—6. To you then no less than to others I would say, “Sleep not as do others, but watch and be sober.” 1 Thess. v. 6—8.

WE SHOULD WATCH FOR OUR LORD'S SECOND COMING

Mark xiii. 37.—What I say unto you I say unto all, Watch. (H. H.)

God is pleased to speak to us, not only in his word, but by the dispensations of his providence. Calamities, whether foreign or domestic, whether public or personal, are sent by him to awaken our drowsy consciences, and to stir us up to a remembrance of our latter end. By all of them, whether menaced only, or actually inflicted, he addresses us, as Jesus did his disciples (whom he had forewarned of the evils coming upon Jerusalem, and hereafter also upon the whole world), "Watch therefore, for ye know not when the Master of the house cometh."

On a subject like this we should in vain attempt to speak any thing new. But though we may do no more than remind you of truths with which you are already well acquainted, it will not be unprofitable for me to suggest to your thoughts,

I. THE UNCERTAINTY OF THE TIME WHEN OUR LORD WILL COME TO JUDGMENT—

Our Lord, in illustrating what he had been speaking respecting the day of judgment, compares himself to a master leaving his house, and appointing his servants their work, and commanding his porter to watch, in order to admit him without delay at whatever moment he should return. He represents the precise time of his return to judgment as unknown to men, or angels, or even to himself; (so far at least, that the Holy Spirit, by which he was anointed to his prophetic office, had not communicated it to him as any part of the revelation which he was to make known to men;) and from thence inculcates the necessity of incessant watchfulness. Now, as the time of death is to us the commencement of our eternal state, and as it is equally unknown to us as the judgment itself, we shall direct our attention more particularly to that.

But what shall we say on such a subject as this? It needs neither proof nor elucidation: nor can any words make the uncertainty of life more evident, than the observation and experience of every man have already made it. We appeal to your observation of what takes place around you: Does not our Lord call men to death and judgment at every age, and often when his summons is least expected?— — — We appeal to your experience: Can you not recal to your minds many accidents which might have proved fatal? and do you not see, that you are yet liable every day and hour to be taken away by disease or accident?— — —

Instead of dwelling on so obvious a truth, we will endeavor to point out,

II. OUR DUTY ARISING FROM THIS CONSIDERATION—

Thrice in the space of a few verses does our Lord repeat the same injunction, "Watch," see ver. 33. To enforce this, we would say,

1. Expect the second coming of your Lord—

Put not from you, as you are too apt to do, the thoughts of death and judgment, but cherish them in your minds, and labor to get them impressed upon your hearts. Reflect upon their *uncertainty*, as to the precise period of their arrival, their *nearness*, their *awfulness*; and keep yourselves, as it were, in the daily and hourly expectation of them— — —

2. Prepare to meet him—

Two things are indispensable for all who would behold his face in peace, namely, "repentance towards God, and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ." These must be experienced by you— — — neither the one nor the other can

be dispensed with.— — —Get a deep repentance therefore, and a lively faith: and rest not in any state short of that which the scriptures require, and the primitive christians actually attained.

3. Guard against any measure of drowsiness which may interrupt or render doubtful your preparation for him—

It will be a fearful thing if the Master of the house “should find you sleeping.” Yet who amongst us is not apt at times to be “weary in well-doing?” “The wise virgins, as well as the foolish, slumbered and slept:” yea, even the Apostles slept, when our Lord had bidden them watch. We should therefore “exhort one another daily, and so much the more as we see the day approaching:” and, instead of giving way to sloth, should use all possible means, to “strengthen the things which remain that are ready to die.”

ADDRESS,

1. The careless—

How many continue such in spite of all the warnings which they have received from sickness in themselves, or the sudden deaths of others! But what will they think of their conduct, when once they are taken hence? If any one of us knew that a thief would certainly come this very night to break into his house, would he lay himself down to sleep as at other times? Should we not watch, and use our utmost efforts to frustrate his designs? Why then do we not act thus in reference to our souls? Are our souls of less value than our property, or the concerns of time than those of eternity? Are not the consequences of unwatchfulness sufficiently awful? Matt. xxiv. 48—51. And is not our real danger increased, rather than diminished, in proportion to our security? 1 Thess. v. 3. Prov. vi. 9—11. To every one then who is unconcerned about his eternal state, and unprepared to meet his God, we address the reproof which even heathen mariners gave to a prophet of the Lord; “What meanest thou, O sleeper? arise and call upon thy God, if so be that God will think upon thee, and thou perish not.” Jonah i. 6.

2. The half-awakened—

Pardon the term: it is but too appropriate to the states of many, who, if good wishes would carry them to heaven, would not come short of it; but when God calls them to run, and strive, and wrestle, and fight, will not exert themselves in the way that requires. Nevertheless God’s word is true; “The kingdom of heaven suffereth violence, and the violent take it by force:” “Many shall *seek* to enter in, and shall not be able;” none shall succeed but those who “*strive*.” Guard then against the fate of the foolish virgins, who were not aware of their want of Divine grace, till it was too late to obtain it. Matt. xxv. 8—13. Let the Apostle’s exhortation sink down into your ears, Rom. xiii. 11—14, and adopt instantly the resolution of the Prophet, “I will stand upon my watch-tower, and will watch to see what God will say to me, and what I shall answer when I am reproved” Hab. ii. 1.

3. The professing people of God—

Think not yourselves above the exhortation in our text: “What we say unto some, we must say unto *all*, Watch.” See what a caution our blessed Lord addressed to his own Apostles, Luke xxi. 34—36: and then say, whether *any* caution can be too strong for *you*. Many who have appeared to run well, have turned back again; and not a few have died without ever returning to the good way from which they have departed. Be ye then on your guard, “lest, having known the way of righteousness, ye turn from

the holy commandment delivered unto you." Beware of imitating the slothful conduct of the Spouse in Solomon's Song, lest, like her, you provoke your heavenly Friend to depart from you. Cant. iii. 1 & v. 2—6. Watch unto prayer with habitual persevering earnestness. Eph. vi. 18. You know the truths we have insisted on; act therefore agreeably to them, and to your holy profession. 1 Thess. v. 2, 4—8. "Have your loins continually girt, and your lamps trimmed, and yourselves as those who wait for the coming of their Lord."*

THE DUTY OF HOPING IN GOD.

Ps cxxx. 7, 8.—Let Israel hope in the Lord; for with the Lord there is mercy, and with him is plenteous redemption. And he shall redeem Israel from all his iniquities. (S. S.)

THAT advice which flows from experience is at all times most worthy of our attention. In this view the words of our text claim peculiar regard. David, in the Psalm before us, records a very signal deliverance which he had recently experienced, probably from an overwhelming sense of his own guilt and corruption; and, having informed us what methods he had used to obtain deliverance, and how effectual they had proved for his restoration to happiness, he recommends the adoption of them to all the people of God under all difficulties whatsoever; and assures them, that they shall not in any instance fail of success: "Let Israel," &c.

He sets before us,

I. OUR DUTY.

Hope in God, as men generally use the term, is nothing more than an unfounded expectation that God will save us, whatever be our state, and whatever be our conduct. But a scriptural hope implies a suitable regard to the things we hope for, and to him in whom our hope is placed. It implies,

1. That we pray to him with fervour.

This was united with the Psalmist's hope; ver. 1, 2; and it must also be with ours. Matt. vii. 7, 8. To pretend to hope in God while we neglect to spread our wants before him, is the grossest hypocrisy, and the most fatal delusion. Ezek. xxxvi. 37.

2. That we wait for him with patience.

It was in this manner that David exercised his hope. Ver. 5, 6. Nor can we act otherwise, if we be sincere in our profession. Rom. viii. 25. To be impatient, is an unequivocal mark of unbelief, and despondency. Isa. xxviii. 16; 1 Sam. xiii. 11, 12. But to wait patiently the Lord's leisure is the office and evidence of faith and hope. Hab. ii. 3.

3. That we depend on him with steadfastness.

The promises of God to those who seek him, must be the ground of our hope. Ver. 5. We are not to regard difficulties of any kind, as though they could prove any obstacle to God. However circumstances, both within and without, may seem to justify despair, we must "hope beyond and against hope," *παρ' ἐλπίδα* Rom. iv. 18; Job xiii. 15; Isa. i. 10, assured that, as nothing is impossible with God, so not one jot or tittle of his word shall ever fail

* Supposing this were a funeral Sermon for a truly pious person, some little mention of his character might be made here.

This duty being of infinite importance, and of universal obligation, let us consider,

II. OUR ENCOURAGEMENT TO PERFORM IT.

If we look inward, we shall find nothing but discouragement. But if, with David, we look to God, we may find abundant encouragement.

1. In his attributes.

While justice bears a frowning aspect, mercy smiles on the repenting sinner. God has opened a way for the exercise of his mercy in perfect consistency with the demands of justice; and to exercise it is his delight. Mic. vii. 18. This attribute is as essential to his nature as wisdom, or power, or any other. Exod. xxxiv. 6, 8. Nor needs he to have it excited by a view of our misery; (much less by any meritorious services of ours) it is ever "with him;" and is ready to manifest itself towards all those who call upon him. Rom. x. 12.

2. In his works.

"Redemption" is the crown of all his works: and this also is with him, that he may impart it to those who groan under their sore bondage. Yea, with him is "plenteous" redemption: he himself as our near kinsman, (bone of our bone, and flesh of our flesh, Eph. v. 30.) has the right of redemption vested in him: Lev. xxv. 25, 47, 48, 49; and having ability to pay the price, he will discharge our debt, and restore us, not only to liberty, but also to the inheritance which we have so basely alienated.

3. In his word.

The declaration of his determined purpose by an inspired writer, is equivalent to an express promise. And, if the extent and certainty of this promise be considered, what an encouragement will it afford us to hope in God! There is no limitation whatever to the promise, provided, like "Israel" of old, we wrestle with God for the performance of it. Gen. xxxii. 24—28. However numerous and inveterate our iniquities may be, they shall "*all*" be pardoned, and "*all*" subdued. Isaiah i. 18.

APPLICATION.

1. To prevent any abuse of this subject, we shall *guard* it.

The repetition of the name "Israel" distinctly marks the characters to whom the text is more immediately to be applied. It is the *praying, waiting, and depending* sinner that is exhorted to hope in God: and it is he alone who can expect redemption at the hands of God. Let such therefore see their duty and their privilege: but let those who live in the habitual neglect of God know, that their "hope is as a spider's web, that shall soon be swept away with the besom of destruction." Job viii. 13, 14.

2. To impress the subject more deeply on our minds, we shall *enforce* it.

The advice here given is the most *suitable* that can be given, and if followed, will be *productive* of the greatest *happiness*. Were any of us directed to indulge an hope from our own endeavors, we should soon perceive the folly of such advice. Every day and hour would bring us fresh occasion for despair. But in God there is nothing wanting: he has the *right*, the *power*, and the *will* to redeem us. Nor, if we trust in him, shall we ever be confounded. Isaiah xlv. 17.

Let us therefore not limit either the mercy or power of our God, but putting away all self-righteous hopes, Phil. iii. 3. or unbelieving fears, Ps. xlii. 11. let us repose an unlimited confidence in our merciful and faithful Redeemer.

THE DUTY OF THE CHURCH AS MARRIED TO CHRIST.

Ps. xlv. 10, 11.—Hearken, O daughter, and consider, and incline thine ear; forget ~~also~~ thine own people, and thy father's house. So shall the King greatly desire thy beauty: for he is thy Lord; and worship thou him. (S. S.)

EVERY change of situation brings with it many correspondent duties—

That of marriage in particular requires a sacrifice of other attachments—

It binds each party to renounce whatever habits or practices may be found inconsistent with their mutual happiness—

Such sacrifices are more eminently necessary for those united to Christ*—

To this effect God addresses the church in the words of our text—

We may consider,

I. THE DIRECTION GIVEN TO THE CHURCH.

The church is, by adoption, by regeneration, and especially by her union with the Lord Jesus Christ, become the "daughter" of God—2 Cor. vi. 18.

She is here addressed by him under that affectionate appellation—

Nor is it possible for a father to give more salutary advice—

Or to deliver it in more persuasive terms; "Hearken, consider, incline," &c.

The direction itself is of a very peculiar nature.

The Jews were permitted to marry the heathen virgins whom they had taken in war—

But they were to allow them the space of a month to forget their own relations—Deut. xxi. 10—13.

Thus the captives, weaned from former habits, might become loving companions, and obedient wives—

In reference to this law, the church is exhorted to forget her friends—

She has been taken captive by Christ, who makes her the first overtures of marriage—

But his union with her is incompatible with carnal attachments—

She can never love and obey him as she ought, till her heart be weaned from all other lovers—

It is given to every individual in the church of God.

Every wife is to forsake her parents, and cleave to her husband—Gen. ii. 24.

Much more is it needful for the soul to forsake all for Christ—

To him we are espoused by our own voluntary surrender—2 Cor. xi. 2.

Nor will he be satisfied with a divided heart—Hos. x. 2.

Ungodliness and worldly lusts must be entirely renounced—Tit. ii. 11, 12, and 1 Pet. iv. 2, 3.

The companions of our unregenerate state must be forsaken—2 Cor. vi. 14—17.

Our very parents, yea, even life itself, must be hated, when they stand in competition with him—Luke xiv. 26.

The change in our actions and affections must be entire—2 Cor. v. 17.

And we must subscribe from our hearts the terms proposed to us—Hos. iii. 3.

This injunction will not appear harsh, if we attend to,

*The psalm before us is a kind of nuptial hymn; the former part of which recites the excellencies and glories of the heavenly Bridegroom, and the latter celebrates the praises of the church, which is his bride.

II. THE ARGUMENTS WITH WHICH IT IS ENFORCED.

God deals with us in all things as intelligent beings—

And labors to persuade us by rational considerations.

1. It is our highest interest.

Though the church is vile in herself, she is complete in Christ—Col. ii. 10.

He has given orders for her thorough purification—Esther ii. 3.

When she is presented to him, she is cleansed from all the filthiness of her former state—Eph. v. 25—27.

Hence she is exceeding beautiful in his eyes—Song iv. 9—11.

And he feels a longing desire after communion with her—Song ii. 14.

No bridegroom ever so much rejoiced over his bride, as he over her—Isa. lxii. 5.

More especially is he delighted with her when he sees that her heart is whole with him. Prov. xi. 20.

How powerful an argument is this with an ingenuous soul!—

What can influence a wife more than to know that her conduct will conciliate the esteem of her husband?—

And what can delight a regenerate soul so much, as to please Christ?—

Let this hope then animate us to renounce all for him—

And to address him in the words of holy David—Ps. lxxiii. 25

2. It is our indispensable duty.

The husband is to be considered as a Lord over his wife—1 Pet. iii. 6.

To him she owes an humble obediential reverence—Eph. v. 33.

Christ also is the supreme head and Lord of his Church—

No limits whatever are to be set to his authority—

We must “worship” and serve him equally with God the Father—John —v. 23.

Let us then at least shew him that regard, which we ourselves expect from a fellow-creature—

A husband will not endure a rival in his wife’s affections—

Shall we then “provoke the Lord himself to jealousy” by carnal attachments?—

Let us not dare in such a way to violate our nuptial engagements—

When any thing solicits a place in our hearts, let us utterly reject it—

And let us exercise that fidelity towards him, which we have ever experienced at his hands—

ADDRESS,

1. Those who are endeavoring to unite the love of the world with the love of Christ.

The interests of the world, and of Christ, are altogether opposite—

Our Lord declares them to be absolutely irreconcilable—Matt. vi. 24.

St. James also represents even a wish to reconcile them, as an incontestible proof of enmity against God—Jam. iv. 4.

As Jesus deserves, so he demands our whole hearts—Prov. xxiii. 26.

Let us not then “mock him, and deceive ourselves”—

If the Lord be God, let us not serve Baal, but him—1 Kings xviii. 21.

And let us unite in imitating the repentant Jews—2 Chron. xv. 12.

2. Those who are desirous of uniting themselves to Christ.

It is a great honor indeed which ye aspire after—

Yet is it offered to the vilest of the human race—Ezek. xvi. 3, 4, 5, 8.

But you must get a change of raiment, that you may not dishonor your new station—Zech. iii. 3—5.

Labor then to "purge out all remains of the old leaven"—

Be on your guard, lest after having escaped the pollutions of the world, you be again entangled with them and overcome—2 Pet. ii. 20.

"Remember Lot's wife" that you may shun her example—

So shall you enjoy the sweetest fellowship with Jesus—

And live in the fruition of him to all eternity*—

THE DUTY OF WALKING IN THE LIGHT.

John xii. 35, 36. Yet a little while is the light with you. Walk while ye have the light, lest darkness come upon you: for he that walketh in darkness, knoweth not whither he goeth. While ye have light, believe in the light, that ye may be the children of light. (S. S.)

THE perverseness of men in resisting the means of conviction, is apt to beget an asperity in the minds of their instructors, and to make them cease from their labors of love. But we are required "in meekness to instruct them that oppose themselves." And our blessed Lord affords us in this respect an admirable example. He had plainly told the Jews, that he must be crucified: and their very answer shews that they understood his meaning. But, instead of receiving the information aright, they cavilled at it, and concluded from thence that he could not be the Messiah, ver. 32—34. Our Lord did not judge it proper at that time to afford them any farther means of conviction, when they had so abused those that were already afforded them: but he most affectionately warned them to improve their present advantages, before they should be finally withdrawn from them.

The words being equally applicable to us, we shall consider,

I. THE EXHORTATION.

Christ is here spoken of as "the light."

We might consider the term "light" *in general*, as referring to the gospel: but *here* it undoubtedly relates to Christ himself. John i. 9, and viii. 12, and xii. 46. He is justly characterized by this name, not only as being the eternal fountain of light, but as enlightening the world by his doctrines and life.

"In him," under this character, we are to "believe."

All that he has spoken respecting his person, work, and offices, together with all his promissory, or threatening declarations, should be received by us without gainsaying, and be relied upon without hesitation.

"In him" also we ought to "walk."

We view earthly things in the light of the material sun; and avail ourselves of its light, every step we take. Precisely thus should we act with respect to Christ, "the Sun of Righteousness." We should view sin and holiness, time and eternity, yea, every thing without exception, in the light that HE, by his word and conduct, reflects upon it. Nor should we take any one step in life, without a direct reference to his word as our rule, and his life as our example.—1 John ii. 6.

To render this exhortation more impressive, let us consider,

II. THE ARGUMENTS WITH WHICH IT IS ENFORCED.

* This subject, and all others of a similar nature, must be treated with extreme care and delicacy.

There are three topics mentioned in the text, from whence we may urge this important duty,

1. From the shortness of the time that we shall enjoy the light.

The Jews now had the light; but it was to be extinguished within the space of four days. Hence our Lord *repeatedly* urges this consideration. "Walk, *while ye have the light.*" And how strongly does this argument apply to us! You have the light at present, yea, even greater light than the Jews enjoyed under the ministry of Christ: (for there were many subjects, which he did not fully open; and the things he did utter, could not be perfectly understood, till the day of Pentecost; whereas you have Christ exhibited to you in all his glory; and the fulness, the freeness, the suitableness of his salvation constantly set before you.) But how soon may it be removed from you, or you from it! Rev. ii. 5. Amos viii. 11, 12. O then, "*while ye have the light*, believe, and walk, in the light."

2. From the danger we incur by disregarding the light.

If we will not attend to the voice of Christ, a "darkness will come upon us," even "darkness that may be felt." They who never have had Christ preached unto them, are indeed in an awful condition; but by no means so awful as that, of those who have despised the gospel, ver. 39, 40. The darkness of which the text speaks, is *judicial*, sent them by God as the punishment of their iniquity; and the very light that shines around them, serves only to increase their blindness, and to aggravate their guilt. 2 Cor. ii. 15, 16. 2 Thess. ii. 11, 12. In this state, "they stumble at the noon-day," and wander, "not knowing whither they go;" till at last they fall into that pit of destruction, where is weeping, and wailing, and gnashing of teeth for evermore.

Should not then the dread of such a state lead us to a just improvement of our present privileges?

3. From the benefit arising to those who rightly improve the light.

By "children of light" we may understand either *children of God* (who is light) or, *truly enlightened persons*.* In either sense the general import is the same, namely, that, by believing in Christ, we shall attain the knowledge and enjoyment of God. Compare this state with that of those who are in darkness; and how great will this benefit appear!

Shall not then this blessed prospect allure us to embrace the gospel? Or shall we still prefer sin and misery to holiness and glory?

APPLICATION.

Let us no longer withstand the solemn warnings, and affectionate exhortations of the Lord Jesus; but improve to the utmost this accepted time, this day of salvation.

*Thus *ὁὶ ἀπὸ τοῦ φωτός* is used; Eph. ii. 2, and *τινα κατὰ χάριν*, 2 Pet. ii. 14, is so translated, as *ὁὶ φωτός* may be here.

DILIGENCE IN DUTY NECESSARY TO BE FOUND OF GOD IN PEACE.

2 Pet. iii. 14.—Wherefore, beloved, seeing ye look for such things, be diligent, that ye may be found of him in peace without spot and blameless. (H.)

THE Apostle is speaking, in the preceding verses, of the drowning of the world by water, the coming of the day of the Lord, the destruction of the world by fire, and of a better state of things, in answer to the scoffers of the last days, who said, "Where is the promise of his coming? Since the Fathers fell asleep all things continue as they were." Verse 4. The words are an inference, or conclusion, from these promises. "Wherefore, beloved, since ye looked for such things." I shall have occasion to consider the context, in speaking to the words; what I propose is, to draw forth the sense of them in the several parts of which they consist.

I. IT IS HERE SUPPOSED THAT WE MUST BE JUDGED, and that an inquiry will be made into the states of men. This is implied in the expression, "being found in him;" i. e. by him as judge, or before him, when he shall come. The apostle uses the same expression in the same sense. Phil. iii. 9. The term relates to the final judgment, when the great inquiry shall be made, and the states of men determined. The future judgment is particularly represented and described in Scripture; I shall give you a short view of it to engage and affect your minds.

1. The time of it is appointed. The apostle here speaks of the day of judgment, and the coming of the day of God; chap. ii. 9; iii. 12; the period is determinately fixed; Acts xvii. 31; but of that day and hour knoweth no man. When the period arrives, there will not be a moment's delay; and it will come too soon, come when it will, for those who scoff at the seeming delay.

2. The judge is ordained. This our Lord himself tells us. John v. 22, 27; and again, Rom. ii. 16; 2 Cor. v. 10. The Saviour of sinners is to be Judge of sinners. His appearance will be very glorious, and with great magnificence and grandeur. Luke ix. 26.

3. The rule of judgment is fixed, or the measure of proceeding at that day. We are to be tried by the gospel of Christ, and not by the law of innocence. If he were to enter into judgment with us, and to be strict to mark iniquity, no living creature could be justified, or stand before him. The whole world must be condemned at his bar, and upon the ground of rigorous justice. But we shall be judged by the gospel of Christ, and according to the gracious constitution of the new covenant; so the apostle says. Rom. ii. 16. The apostle James is more direct, chap. i. 25. where he calls the gospel the law of liberty; also, the perfect law of liberty. chap. ii. 12. And which the apostle calls the law of faith, Rom. iii. 27. in opposition to the law of works, which accepts of true believers in Christ, or sincerity of heart, without absolute perfection, and with many imperfections. This is included in the books which shall be opened; Rev. xx. 12. and according to which he will judge the world in righteousness.

4. The persons to be judged are the whole world or the whole race of sinful man. All who died in Adam, shall be judged by Christ, as well as made alive by him; for they are raised in order to be judged. All nations are to be gathered before him. Matt. xxv. 32. We are all to appear before him; 2 Cor. v. 10. the small and great, Rev. xx. 12.

5. The matter of judgment or the cause to be tried, is expressed in the most comprehensive terms; Eccl. xii. 14. and this is the constant language

of the gospel. 2 Cor. v. 10. So that every man shall be rewarded according to his deeds; Rom. ii. 6. being judged according to their works. Rev. xx. 13: xxii. 12. God will judge the secrets of men by Jesus Christ; the most retired transactions of their lives, and the workings of their thoughts and desires, which lie concealed in their own breast, and fall not under the notice of others; and every idle word which men shall speak, they shall give an account thereof, Matt. xii. 36; *i. e.* every evil word, which is either false or hurtful.

6. And then there is the final issue and event of judgment; *i. e.* rewards and punishments. To the righteous it will be, "well done good and faithful servant, enter thou into the joy of thy Lord; and come ye blessed." &c. Matt. xxv. 34. 41. To the wicked it will be, "thou wicked and slothful servant; cast the unprofitable servant into outer darkness, there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth; and, go, ye cursed," &c. verse 46. The execution of the sentence will immediately follow, "for these shall go away into everlasting punishment, but the righteous into life eternal." They each shall go to their respective, final, and unchangeable state; and so, from the consequence of it, it is called the eternal judgment. Heb. vi. 2.

II. I OBSERVE, THAT A CHRISTIAN'S GREAT CONCERN is to be found of his judge in peace, and without spot and blameless. Here is a double expression used, which evidently refers to two different things, of the greatest importance.

1. It refers to our justification and acceptance with God, which is the state of every true believer. There can be no peace in the day of judgment to a fallen sinner, but in the way of forgiveness. We must be pardoned and justified through the blood of Christ; for that is the measure of our present acceptance with God, which will be the rule of the final judgment; so the apostle says; Phil. iii. 9, which is parallel to that of the apostle. Acts xiii. 39; also Gal. ii. 16. Thus we are brought into a state of friendship with God for being justified by faith; Rom. v. 1, we have peace with God.

The consequence of this is, peace of mind; a composed frame of mind, without the uneasiness of doubt, or torment of fear, or dread of divine displeasure. A blessed serenity of mind, arising from the testimony of conscience to their own sincerity, and the witness of the Spirit to their relation to God. They have that peace of God which passes all understanding; which none of the troubles of life, or fear of death, nor the presence of the Judge, or the terror of judgment, can disturb.

And this will appear in a peaceable frame of mind towards others: in good-will towards all men, fervent love to all the children of God. Heb. xii. 14.

I shall only farther add, that although the believer is justified already, yet we are most properly justified at the final judgment, when it will be most solemn and most complete.

2. It refers to our sanctification and holiness. This is the import of the other expression, "without spot and blameless." This may refer to our present sanctification, which is called the sanctification of the Spirit, &c. Eph. i. 4. For this end God has chosen believers; Phil. ii. 15; and they are to keep themselves unspotted, &c. James i. 27. This was the character of Zachariah and Elizabeth. Luke i. 6. And as such Jesus Christ will present them to himself at last. Eph. v. 27; also 1 Thess. iii. 13. It is a great act of the mediation of Christ, towards his members, not only to "wash them in his own blood, but to present them pure and faultless at last." This certainly was the grand end of his whole undertaking; see Titus ii.

4; also 1 Peter iii. 18. Paul represents it as the highest ambition of the christian's heart; 2 Cor. v. 9, and the greatest blessing he could wish for others. Phil. i. 10.

III. THAT IN ORDER TO OUR BEING FOUND OF OUR JUDGE IN PEACE we must be diligent. It is a work of labor and care, and not to be done with idleness and sloth. Men may sit still and perish; but they must be diligent who would be saved. Consider this diligence according to the scripture account of it, in the following instances.

1. There must be the due exercise of our natural faculties and reasonable powers. Those, we readily admit, are weakened and disordered by sin; but divine assistance is promised by God, who is the God of nature as well as grace. We are reasonable creatures, when we are not holy creatures, and can act as men, when we cannot act as saints, and in order to being such, see Deut. xxxii. 29; Isa. xlvi. 8; Hos. v. 4; 1 Cor. xiv. 20; Phil. ii. 12.

2. The improvement of the talents and enjoyments of life. Every man has his proper talents, besides his natural powers, though in different degrees, for which he must account at last. Matt. xxv. 14; Luke xix. 13. Such are life and health, acquired knowledge and experience, liberty and opportunity, possessions and prosperity, interest and credit in the world. Those who improve therein shall be commended, Matt. xxv. 21, and those who do not improve them shall be punished, ver. 25. We are only stewards of our talents; Luke xvi. 2, and our Lord advises a proper use of them; ver. 9; also the apostle, 1 Tim. vi. 17.

3 We must perform the proper duties of our place and station. John ix. 4. In this sense our Lord pronounces his servants blessed; Matt. xxiv. 46, and this the apostle recommends. 2 Pet. i. 10. Faithfulness in the way of duty is a good preparation for the coming of the Lord. 1 Cor. xv. 58.

4. There must be watchfulness against sin. So our Lord directs his disciples in this case: Luke xxi. 34, in this view he often requires watchfulness. Matt. xxvi. 41, 42; Mark xiii. 37. The apostle abounds with exhortations to sobriety and watchfulness. 1 Thess. v. 6, 8; Pet. iv. 7; Heb. xii. 15, 17. And the judge is represented saying, "Behold I come, blessed is he that watcheth and keepeth his garments." Rev. xvi. 15.

5. The use of appointed means, or institutions of worship. These are properly means of grace. Thus we must be found in the daily practice of prayer. Luke xviii. 1; also xxi. 36. We must converse with the word of God; Heb. ii. 1; 2 Pet. i. 19, and the apostle says, that "God is a rewarder of them who diligently seek him," or come to him in any way of worship or service. Particularly the Lord's Supper is a perpetual memorial, not only of the death, but of the coming of Christ. 1 Cor. xi. 26. Thus, by frequent converses with God in the ordinances of his worship, and receiving communications from him, we are formed to a more spiritual frame, and serious habit of mind, and in a nearer fitness for the coming of the Lord. Hereupon,

6. There must be the exercise and improvement of suitable graces, or proper dispositions of mind. 2 Pet. i. 5; iii. 18. Particularly faith; Heb. vi. 1; also hope; Heb. vi. 11; 1 Pet. i. 13; and looking; Tit. ii. 13; Heb. ix. 28; Jude 21, and in this chapter, ver. 12.

IV. I SHALL CONSIDER THE MOTIVES and reasons of this diligence here suggested and referred to. This is intimated in the words of connexion, "Wherefore, beloved, seeing ye look for such things; *i. e.* the things which

he had been speaking of, or the arguments of his foregoing discourse. The great ideas in his mind at that time were,

1. The destruction of the present world, ver. 7, to be accomplished by a deluge of fire; also, ver. 10, the whole globe of the earth shall be set on fire, and whatever belongs to it, and has been infected with sin. All the works of nature and of art, the stately buildings and proud palaces, the monuments of vanity, ambition, and curiosity, which have endured for many ages, and stood the longest injuries of time; all the grandeur and glory of this world, the pageantry and show of it, will be then destroyed and consumed to ashes, and there will be no remainder or ruins of them left; "for the heavens shall pass away," &c., ver. 10.

There will be a universal conflagration; heaven and earth will be all on fire at once, and make one burning vault, one funeral pile: it will be the funeral of the world. What will be the terror of the affrighted inhabitants! no place of refuge! Yea, the fire which will consume the world, will destroy the wicked, ver. 7. Now, how forcible is the reason? Be diligent to be found of him in peace, when the great day of his wrath shall come.

2. The expectation of a better state, ver. 13. He represents it as the common expectation of christians, grounded on the promise of God; "we, according to his promise, look for it, a new heaven and a new earth." Isa. lxxv. 17. Heaven and earth will be alike, at least for a limited time, and become a glorious state, in which only righteousness and righteous persons shall dwell. And the expectation of such a state of things should operate as a powerful motive, that we may not come short of the glory of God, but be fit to partake of it, and share in all the blessedness of it. Let us, therefore, according to our Lord's direction, "watch and pray, that we may be accounted worthy to escape all these things which shall come to pass, and to stand before the Son of man." And, in the words of the apostle, "Give diligence, so an entrance shall be ministered abundantly into the everlasting kingdom; and, let us labor to enter into that rest, lest any man fall after the same example of unbelief."

CONSTANCY CROWNED BY CHRIST.

Rev. ii. 10.—Be thou faithful, &c. (H.)

THESE are the words of our Saviour to the angel or pastor of the church of Smyrna; and they divide themselves into two parts, a precept and a promise. The precept is in these words—"Be thou faithful unto death." The promise in these—"And I will give," &c. There is the work in the one, and the reward in the other. I shall,

1. CONSIDER THE DUTY HERE RECOMMENDED. Faithfulness here, relates to the Lord Jesus Christ; our being true to our profession of his religion—to our repeated engagements with him to be his—our attachment to him, and our obedience to his commands—to continue therein to the end of our life. The necessity of this will appear, when we consider that,

1. Not to persevere, is a curtailed sacrifice, a maimed service, and such as God will not accept. No maimed beast was to be presented in sacrifice. Lev. xxii. 21, 22.

2. Inconstancy and instability is an argument of unsoundness and insincerity. Prov. xvii. 17

3. Christ persevered for us, and therefore we ought to persevere for him John xiii. 1. He is not only the beginning, but finisher of faith. Heb xii. 2. He held out to the last gasp. John xix. 30.

4. It is a rule in civil law, that it is as nothing that holdeth not. A will unfinished is no will; a deed, unless it be signed, sealed, and delivered, is no deed.

5. 'The former part of our life yieldeth to the latter; and the latter part of our life carrieth away from the former. Ezek. xviii. 21, 22. And so on the other side also, ver. 24.

6. 'The end of every thing is all in all. Ps. xxxvii. 37; lxxiii. 17. The grand end of living should be, to make a good end, to be found in peace. 2 Pet. iii. 14.

7. It is perseverance alone that carries away the crown: unless we are faithful unto death, there is no crown of life for us. Christianity is compared to a race. Heb. xii. 1. It is not he that cometh first, but every one that holdeth out to the last is crowned. Matt. xxiv. 13; Mark xiii. 13.

8. God himself is eternal, from whom we expect our reward; and the reward we look for is everlasting. "What hath levity and inconstancy," saith Augustine, "to do with eternity?"

And if we would be faithful to Christ, our master, and hold out in our christian course to the end, we must,

1. Enter upon it with resolution: we must count the cost. Luke xiv. 28—30. Lay our accounts with the worst, and prepare for it. Luke xiv. 33. It is for want of this that many, who at first ran well, have been hindered.

2. Labor after sincerity. That which is counterfeit will not last long. Ps. lxxviii. 37; 1 Tim. iv. 1.

3. Be careful to keep a good conscience; 1 Tim. 1. 19; iii. 9, which some have cast away. 1 Tim. i. 19.

4. Slight no sin. Every sin, however small, comparatively speaking, is of a deadly nature. The mote must be cast out as well as the beam. Matt. vii. 3, 4.

5. Be jealous of thine own weakness; trust not too much to thine own strength. This was Peter's fault, and we know how foully he fell. Matt. xxvi. 33—35; John xiii. 37. And his fault is left upon record, as a warning to us.

6. Shun evil occasions. By unwatchfulness in this, thousands relapse into sin. 2 Pet. ii. 20. See David's case. Ps. cxlii. 3. Satan has his snares in our meat, drink, apparel, recreation, lawful delights, our trading, traffic, buying, and selling: we walk among snares, Job xxii. 10, and had need tread warily, Prov. iv. 25, 26, and walk wisely. Eph. v. 15.

7. Be much in prayer to God for support. Matt. xxvi. 41. It is from him that we must receive strength to stand. Eph. vi. 10, 11, 13. Thus prayed David. Ps. lxxxvi. 11.

8. Keep the fear of God alive in thy soul. Pray with David, Ps. lxxxvi. 11, and God will fulfil his promise. Jer. xxxii. 40.

9. Take heed of standing still; for he that begins to stand still, will soon draw back. 2 Pet. iii. 17. And to prevent it, grow in grace, ver. 18. If we be not growing, we are decaying.

10. Walk in humility. Take heed of pride. Remember Uziah; 2 Chron. xxvi. 16, remember Hezekiah. 2 Chron. xxxii. 25, 26. It is a deadly poison, exceedingly displeasing to God, 1 Pet. v. 5, and destructive to the work of grace in the soul.

11. Consider the short time that this laborious course is required of us; it is only till death; and, as our life is short, that employment cannot be long that is to end with it. Not that our fidelity to Christ shall ever end, but our trials in consequence of it shall; they are but light and momentary. 2 Cor. iv. 17.

12. Be often surveying the royal reward promised in the text, as well as in other parts of the word of God. This was the case with Moses; Heb. xi. 25, 26, and the apostle. 2 Cor. iv. 8, 10, 16, 18. The reward is sure. Gal. vi. 9. It was the case with our Saviour, whose example we may safely imitate. Heb. xii. 2, 3. How important the apostle's advice. Heb. x. 35.

II. THE GRACIOUS PROMISE HERE GIVEN—"I will give," &c.

1. He that promises is Christ, ver. 8, and he is well able to make it good. Matt. xxviii. 18; Rev. ii. 16, 18; iii. 21. He is the Amen, true and faithful. Rev. iii. 14. Those who are faithful to Christ shall find him faithful to them. Heb. x. 23.

2. What he gives is a free gift. We owe him all that we do, or can do. Rom. viii. 12. We can claim nothing of him as our right. Rom. xi. 35, 36. He does not owe us so much as thanks. Luke xvii. 9, 10. Of his mere bounty he will not suffer us to go unrewarded.

3. The gift promised is a crown; 2 Tim. iv. 8, it is a kingdom. Luke xii. 32; Matt. xxv. 34. Who would not strain hard for a crown?—Who would not endure much for a kingdom?

4. This crown is a crown of life; not like the crowns that earthly kings wear, that cannot save them from disease and death. They may die, and do die. Ps. lxxxii. 7; cxlvi. 3, 4. But this is a crown that giveth life to him that hath it, and keepeth him in life that weareth it.

5. The life that this crown giveth (though not expressed here) is an eternal, everlasting life. Matt. xxv. 46. It is an incorruptible crown. 1 Peter i. 4.

I shall now conclude with some improvement of the subject. And,

1. How ample shall be the recompense of the persevering christian! This crown of life—of eternal life, will indeed be a glorious compensation for all his sacrifices, services, and sufferings which he has performed and endured for the sake of Christ. Matt. ix. 27, 28; Mark x. 28—30; Luke xvi. 26, 33.

2. How deplorable the state of those who have forsaken their first love; Rev. ii. 4, 5, who run well for awhile, and then give over; Gal. v. 7, who begin in the Spirit, and end in the flesh; Gal. iii. 3, who put their hand to the plough, and then look back, Luke ix. 62, as Lot's wife did towards Sodom; Gen. xix. 26, that, like Demas, follow Paul awhile, Col. iv. 14, and return again to the world, 2 Tim. iv. 10, and turn away from the holy commandment. 2 Pet. ii. 20—22. Returning like the dog to his vomit, and the sow that was washed to its wallowing in the mire, ver. 22. Their last state is worse than the first. 2 Pet. ii. 20; Matt. xii. 45.

3. Let us consider what we lose if we give over, as well as what we gain, if we persevere. Hold fast, that no man take thy crown. Rev. iii. 11. And what a painful reflection will it be, to think that we have deprived ourselves of a crown, of a kingdom, of eternal felicity, for perhaps a mere trifle, the pleasures of sin, which are but for a season.

4. Be admonished then to hold fast, &c.; ver. 25, to cleave to God; Acts xi. 23, to give all diligence, &c. Heb. vi. 17. And seeing that we know these things, &c. 2 Pet. iii. 17, then may we be faithful unto death, and receive, at last, the crown of life.

PERSEVERANCE IN RELIGION THE CHRISTIAN'S DUTY.

Judges viii. 4.—Faint, yet pursuing. (H.)

FIT me to this for the arms of the Christian; descriptive of the fatigue he endureth, and of his resolution to persevere. Though the words relate to quite another matter, yet they may, without any impropriety, be accommodated to the great purpose of animating us to the duties of our christian profession

I. BRIEFLY DESCRIBE THE CHRISTIAN'S WARFARE.

The life of a real disciple of Jesus is frequently thus represented in scripture. 1 Tim. i. 13; vi. 12; 2 Tim. ii. 3. He is engaged in the cause of God and Christ; of truth and liberty. His enemies are, the devil; 1 Pet. v. 8, the world, evil passions and corruptions; enemies numerous, subtle, powerful who give no quarter. If they cannot conquer, will do their utmost to afflict, distress, torment; the conflict is often fierce and violent. Christ; the Captain under whom he fighteth; his weapons are, "the shield of faith," &c.; the object is the overthrow of sin.

A noble warfare this! and shall in the issue, be crowned with joy, &c.

II. THE VARIOUS TEMPER AND CONDUCT OF THE CHRISTIAN; the reason of his many discouragements on the one hand; and of his resolution to persevere on the other. "Faint, yet pursuing."

1. View him as he is, sometimes faint and spiritless. The most intrepid soldier may, on some occasions, tremble; and the man whose constitution is the most robust and healthful, cannot always boast an exemption from faintness. No wonder that such, at certain intervals, is the sad experience of the christian in regard to the concerns of religion. His hands are feeble and his soul melts like wax; his spirit languisheth, and his strength faileth; and this may, perhaps, be ascribed,

1. To the past toils and labors he has endured.

2. To the want of proper refreshment. 1 Sam. xiv. 31; Isa. i. 10. The apostle was just at the point of fainting. 2 Cor. xii. 9.

3. Through the dread of being overcome. 1 Sam. xxvii. 1.

2. Resuming his wonted courage, and, in the strength of divine grace, resolving to pursue. He will not ignominiously submit: no, he will keep the field, maintain the conflict, push the victory. A brave resolution. He considereth what will be the consequence of submitting, on the one hand, and of pursuing, on the other. In order to animate the timorous in the pursuit, reflect,

1. What will be the effect, should you throw down your arms, yield to the enemy, and apostatize from your profession.

1. You will lose the advantage you have already gained. 2 John 9; Gal. iii. 3, 4; iv. 15; v. 7.

2. Be overcome; and here shame and misery present themselves to your view. This ought to excite to action. Luke xiv. 29, 30; Matt. xii. 43—45; 2 Peter ii. 20, 21; Heb. x. 26—29.

2. In order to quicken and enliven, amidst the fatigues and dangers of this spiritual war, consider,

1. The goodness of the cause in which you are engaged; the cause of God. It is called, "A good fight of faith."

2. The seasonable and effectual support you may depend on receiving. 2 Kings vi. 15, 16; Isa. xli. 10; 2 Cor. xii. 9; Isa. liv. 17; Heb. xiii. 5, 6; Ps. lx. 12.

Christ is also your Captain; and in his character, conduct, and example, **you** have every possible encouragement. Matt. xii. 20.

You may also notice your weapons; you need not to meet the enemy naked. Eph. vi. 10—18.

3. The triumph that shall succeed; the prospect of this should animate you. Rev. xxi. 7.

Inferences.

1. That undisturbed rest and tranquility are not to be expected here.

2. That the Christian may be reduced very low, but not be overcome.

3. Let those who have as yet felt little faintness in their conflict; take heed how they presume. Isa. xl. 29, 30.

Lastly, Ever remember the encouragement you have to pursue. Clad in armor of proof, led by a Captain of unconquerable magnanimity, supported by a numerous body of saints, all shouting, "The sword of the Lord and his Christ;" angels waiting for the event, and a cloud of witnesses, on every side, marking your conduct; and you yourselves pouring out incessant cries to heaven to prosper the enterprize: thus advancing, relying on the power and faithfulness of God, what have you to fear? Victory, complete victory shall crown the day; be persuaded, therefore, "though faint, yet to pursue"

GOD'S CLAIM ON OUR OBEDIENCE.

Exod. v. 2.—Who is the Lord, that I shall obey his voice? (Sk.)

In the verse immediately preceding our text, we find Aaron delivering this message to Pharaoh,—“Thus saith the Lord God of Israel, Let my people go, that they may hold a feast unto me in the wilderness.” To this message, Pharaoh answers in the words before us, “Who is the Lord, that I should obey his voice, to let Israel go? I know not the Lord, neither will I let Israel go.” The words imply, that as Jehovah was not an Egyptian Deity, and consequently not the professed object of Pharaoh's worship, he therefore concluded that he was under no obligation to obey Jehovah's voice. This conclusion teaches us, that ignorance of God is a most alarming evil, as it leads to daring rebellion against God; and this, if persisted in, must be attended with certain destruction, Prov. xxix. 1.

But the inquiry in our text, though at first employed in an avowed contempt of God, will admit of improvement favorable to piety. In attempting to make this improvement, under the divine blessing, let us consider some particulars relative to God's voice; and his claims on our obedience to it.

I. SOME PARTICULARS RELATIVE TO GOD'S VOICE.

By the voice of God is meant the declaration of his will concerning mankind. Here therefore it may be proper to consider,

1. *The persons to whom he speaks—mankind.* “Unto you, O men,” &c. Prov. viii. 4.—He speaks to men as his *favorite* creatures, whose welfare he desires. This appears from his wish, Deut. v. 29. “O that there were,” &c.—from his commands, Isa. xlv. 22; Acts xvii. 30.—his declaration, Ezek. xxxiii. 11.—his complaints, John v. 40; Matt. xxiii. 37,—and his threatenings, Prov. i. 24—26.—He speaks to men as *ignorant* creatures; who need his instruction in order that it may be well with them, Isa

lx. 2, and xlviii. 16, 17; Jer. x. 23, and xxxviii. 20.—He speaks to men as *improvable* creatures; who are intrusted with a gracious talent, Luke xix. 12, 13, and thereby capable of choosing the path of piety, Deut. xxx. 19. 20; Jer. vi. 16.

2. *The means by which he speaks.* These are his *works*, and his *word*.—God speaks to us by his *works*, His works of *creation*, Ps. xix. 1. These prove his existence, Heb. iii. 4, and display his perfections;—his infinite power, goodness, and wisdom, Rom. i. 20. “The invisible things,” &c.

“The meanest pin in nature’s frame,
Marks out some letter of his name;—
Across the earth, around the sky,
There’s not a spot, or deep or high,
Where the Creator hath not trod,
And left the footsteps of a God.”

And by his works of *providence*. His indulgences lead us to repentance, Rom. ii. 4; his corrections and judgments teach us lessons of righteousness, Isa. xxvi. 9. Micah vi. 9. God’s works should therefore be attentively considered by us, Isa. v. 12, 13.—God speaks to us also by his *word*, Heb. i. 1, 2. By this it is his purpose to judge us at the last day, John xii. 48, and by this our whole deportment should now be governed, James ii. 12. Taht we may thus conform to the will of God, let us consider,

3. *What he says to us.* He speaks to us variously, according to our various states, as sinful—submissive—and reclaimed creatures.—As *sinful creatures*, who transgress his laws, he speaks to us in the language of reproof; charging us with rebellion, Isa. i. 1, 2, and ingratitude, Deut. xxxii. 6, and in the language of warning; showing us that we are rejected by him, Prov. xv. 8, 26; under his curse, Gal. iii. 10; and under the sentence of eternal death, Ezek. xviii. 20; Rom. vi. 21.—As *submissive creatures*, who desire to obey him, he speaks to us in the language of kind authority, Isa. lv. 6, 7; Matt. xi. 28, 29; of encouragement, i. 16—18; and of caution against delay, Ps. xc. 7, 8.—As *reclaimed creatures*, restored to his favor and service, he speaks to us in the language of instruction, Micah vi. 8; Tit. ii. 12; and in the language of consolation, Isa. xl. 1; Ps. lxxxiv. 11. Let us consider,

4. *With what design he speaks.* This is to engage our obedience.—His works teach us to glorify him as God, Rom. i. 21.—His word requires practical piety, as man’s indispensable duty, 1 Sam. xv. 22; Matt. vii. 21; James i. 22, 25. The obedience thus required, must be *prompt*, without delay, Job xxii. 21. *Universal*, without defect, Ps. cxix. 6. *Persevering*, without intermission, Rom. ii. 7, and *humble*, without arrogance. It must be humbly ascribed to divine grace, Isaiah xxvi. 12; humbly presented through Christ, for acceptance, 1 Pet. ii. 5; and humbly acknowledged as unprofitable at best, Luke xvii. 10. Such being the obedience which God requires, let us consider,

II. HIS CLAIM ON OUR OBEDIENCE TO HIS VOICE. These will appear by answering the inquiry here instituted; “Who is the Lord,” &c.

1. *He is our indisputable Proprietor.* He becomes thus—By right of *creation*; he is the Lord our Maker, Ps. xc. 6, 7, and c. 3.—And by right of *preservation*; sustaining us by his constant agency on us, and care for us, Job x. 12; Acts xvii. 28; Ps. cxlv. 15. 16. Hence we are obliged to obey God on principles of *equity*, Ps. cxix. 73.

2. *He is our acknowledged Sovereign.* This he is by our baptismal covenant, and by open, deliberate profession of subjection to him, Deut. xxvi. 17. Obedience to God is therefore due on principles of *fidelity*, 2 Tim. ii. 19; Eccl. v. 4.

3. *He is our best Friend, and kindest Benefactor.* This is evident—From his various *providential indulgences*, Ps. lxxviii. 19.—From his *redeeming mercy*, by which eternal salvation is provided for a perishing world; John iii. 16; 2 Cor. viii. 9.—And from his *gracious influence*, which is freely given to all who ask it, Luke xi. 13. Hence obedience to God is due on principles of *gratitude*, Rom. xii. 1.

4. *He is the Disposer of our eternal destiny.* As such,—he is *omniscient*, to observe all our deportment—all our actions, words, and thoughts, Ps. cxxxix. 1—4; Job xxxiv. 21, 22.—He is *just*, to recompense all characters, 2 Cor. v. 10; John v. 28, 29.—He is *powerful*, to execute all his purposes; both of mercy and vengeance, James iv. 12. Hence we should obey God on principles of *prudence*; that we may secure the approbation of our Judge, 1 John ii. 18. *While God remains our Proprietor, our Sovereign, our Friend, and our Judge, his claims must be admitted. And this admission, justifies scriptural piety from reproach—demonstrates the evil of irreligion—and encourages the hope of penitents.*

1. *It justifies scriptural piety from reproach.* By scriptural piety is meant, that obedience which God requires in his word; obedience, seasonable in its commencement; universal in its extent; constant in its exercise; and humble in its pretensions. This is frequently reproached by the ungodly as irrational, disgraceful, injurious to our interests, and a source of melancholy.—But compliance with the demands of justice cannot be unreasonable; the exercise of fidelity and gratitude cannot be disgraceful; the acquisition of godliness cannot be injurious, 1 Tim. iv. 8; nor can melancholy arise from a smiling conscience, and cheerful hope, Matt. xi. 19; 1 Pet. ii. 15.

2. *It demonstrates the evil of irreligion*, or inattention and disobedience to God's voice. This is too common in all ages, Job xxi. 14, 15. It is an evil in itself, as all who are guilty of it are sacrilegious, treacherous, ungrateful, and mad self-destroyers, Eccles. ix. 3. It is an evil in its consequences; being attended with remorse here, and torment hereafter, Rom. iii. 16, 17, 18. Though kings set the dreadful example, and whole nations follow it, neither their dignity nor number can exempt them from vengeance, Isa. xxx. 33; Ps. ix. 17.

3. *It inspires penitence with hope.* God's voice encourages them to hope—for gracious illumination, Prov. i. 23; for redeeming mercy, Ps. cxxx. 7, 8; and for eternal life, Ezek. xviii. 27, 28; Rev. xxii. 14. "*Blessed,*" &c.

THE FATHER'S CHARGE.

Ephesians vi. 4.—And ye fathers, provoke not your children to wrath: but *bring them up* in the nurture and admonition of the Lord. (Sk.)

If we consider our state and circumstances in the world, we cannot fail to be reminded, that we all stand in a twofold relation. We are related to God in an absolute sense, as creatures are related to their Creator; and in a subordinate sense, we are related to each other, as husbands and wives, parents and children. And from every relation in life, there are duties and obligations which necessarily arise, the performance of which is of the utmost importance to the happiness of man, and the wellbeing of society. From the indissoluble relation in which we stand to God, spring the duties of love, reverence, and obedience: and from the connexion which we have with each other, arise obligations, which though of minor importance, are yet of essential utility. The text is addressed to fathers; a class of men who fill most responsible stations in the world; and on whose conduct the tone of morals through all the gradations of society most essentially depends. There can be, therefore, no impropriety in addressing such individuals from the pulpit.—Two things claim their attention,

I. THE DUTIES WHICH PARENTS OWE TO THEIR CHILDREN.

II. THE OBLIGATIONS THEY ARE UNDER TO PRACTICE THOSE DUTIES.

The duties which parents owe to their children, may be distinctly understood, by adverting to the circumstances in which children are placed, on their introduction into the world.

1. *Children are weak and helpless, and totally incapable of caring for themselves; and hence arises the first duty which parents owe them, that of feeding and clothing them.* The weakness of infancy is proverbial. See the helplessness of little children; oh, how mean and degraded is our origin! There is scarcely an animal in existence, that has not, in this sense, the advantage of man. Parents must feed their children.—How pitiable are the circumstances of those parents, whose extreme indigence precludes the possibility of their performing towards their offspring the first duty in nature. Children should be fed, not pampered. The plainest food is the most wholesome, and the most nutritious. The children of the poor, who are fed on the coarsest food, and clothed with the coarsest raiment, or scarcely clothed at all, are the very pictures of health; the rosy cheeks, the sprightly features, the vigorous constitution, all unite to proclaim the utility of plain food and fare.

2. *Children are ignorant, and without understanding; hence they should not only be fed, but taught.* The mind of an infant is a perfect blank, devoid of all intelligence, and even unconscious of its being; but in proportion as the capacities of children expand, and their minds are rendered capable of receiving knowledge, they should be instructed; and who so proper to teach children, as parents. This is the doctrine of the text; *nurture and admonition*, signify, discipline and instruction.—Children should be taught *early*; it is scarcely possible to begin too soon:—*familiarly*; according to their comprehension:—*affectionately*; show them by your conduct how deeply you are interested in their welfare;—*extensively*; whatever concerns their duty; such as propriety of conduct—consistency of character—add the rules of moral conduct.

3. *Children are unruly, and therefore must be governed.* This duty devolves upon parents. Children are fond of having their own will; and

nothing is more difficult than to conquer that headstrong obstinacy which is common to children. But they must be governed, and brought into subjection; and it is as much the duty of parents to govern their children, as it is to feed or clothe them. The dispositions of children vary exceedingly; some may be governed by love, others must be subdued by fear; this makes correction necessary, Prov. xix. 18; xxix. 15; Heb. xii. 9.

4. *Children are prone to evil, and therefore must be restrained.* Eli's sons made themselves vile, and he restrained them not; he mildly reproved them, when he ought to have effectually restrained them; and for this, God punished him with the extirpation of his whole race. Oh! if God were to deal thus with every parent, who treads in the steps of Eli, how many families would have their names cut off from the earth! There are many parents who encourage both by precept and example, the practice of evil in their children; who let them go where they will, and do what they will, without control or restraint. Having briefly hinted at the duties which parents owe to their children, let us notice,

II. THE OBLIGATIONS THEY ARE UNDER TO PRACTICE THOSE DUTIES.

1. *They should do it for their own sake.* For the credit of their own characters. What greater disgrace can attach to a parent, than the neglect of his children? To take no pains to cultivate their minds, to improve their manners, or to save their souls. For their *personal comfort*:—how loud and bitter are the complaints uttered by parents against their children, and how deep the anguish endured on their account. Children may become sources of unspeakable pleasure, or occasions of grievous torment to their parents; but a vast proportion of the misery which they endure, originates in the criminal neglect of their offspring.

2. *They should do it for their children's sake.* We take it for granted that parents love their children, but how do they manifest that love? Perhaps by letting them have their way: that is, in other words, permitting them to go quietly to the devil.—Perhaps by leaving them large property; that is providing food for their pride, and poison for their souls. To bring up our children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord, is to do what we can to make them *wise*, to make them *good*, and to make them *happy*.

3. *They should do it for society's sake.* The children of the present age, will be the men and women of the future age; and the morals of society, half a century hence, will depend, as far as human calculations can go, on the manner in which parents now bring up their children. The seed which is now sown, will then be ripened for the harvest. Those who neglect to practice the advice in the text, not only accelerate the ruin of their children, but do their utmost to make them nuisances and pests to society, wherever their lot may be cast.

4. *They should do it for God's sake.* Children are a heritage of the Lord; they are his property; he is the father of their spirits; but he puts them under the care of their earthly parents, and they are to train them up for him, that they may know, love, and serve him all their days.

CONCLUSION.

1. Learn how careful the apostles were to instruct their converts, not only in the matters of faith, but rules of conduct descending even to the most particular duties of domestic life.

2. The practicability of a religious education. What is here enjoined is possible to be done. Children may be "brought up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord." There may be a thousand petty shifts, to which

ignorant and idle parents may resort to palliate their sins; but the inference from the text is plain.

3. How awful is the responsibility of parents, fathers especially.—*Ye fathers*, the text is God's voice to you; Oh hear it, reverence it, put it into practice!

THE HAPPY RESULT OF WAITING PATIENTLY FOR THE LORD.

Ps. xl. 1—3.—I waited patiently for the Lord; and he inclined unto me, and heard my cry.
He brought me up, &c. (Sk.)

By the prophet Hosea, we hear God complaining, "My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge." From this complaint it appears that *ignorance is destructive*; and numerous facts concur in attesting the same melancholy truth. Some through ignorance of their *state*, remain unconcerned about salvation; some, through ignorance of their *duty*, omit to use the means which are appointed and required by God for obtaining salvation; and others, through ignorance of their *privileges*, conclude there is no hope, and sink into inactive despair of salvation.

Our text is therefore of peculiar importance, as it is exactly calculated to prevent or remove that ignorance which is so fatal to the best interests of mankind. Here we behold a description of our state as sinners, and learn the *necessity* of salvation; a description of our duty, as subjects of a divine Redeemer, and learn the *way* of salvation; a description of our privileges, as gospel penitents, and learn the *attainableness* of salvation. "I waited patiently for the Lord," &c. These verses teach us,

I. OUR STATE AS SINNERS. This we learn from David's state as a sinner, which he describes by the simile of a man fallen into a deep sounding pit; with his feet stuck fast in the miry clay at the bottom of it. This striking figure teaches us that our state, as sinners, is a state of deep declension—of total defilement—of imminent danger—and of utter helplessness.

1. *It is a state of deep declension*; we are deeply fallen. *We are fallen* from the most desirable enjoyments. Man, as the creature of God, while he retained his original rectitude, was the subject of holiness, peace, and hope; but having all sinned, and come short of the glory of God, we have lost our peace and hope, with our purity—we know not the way of peace, Rom. iii. 17, 18;—and we are without hope, while without Christ, Eph. ii. 12;—"the crown is fallen from our head: wo to us that we have sinned." *We are deeply fallen*, into a pit of noise or sounding, as the words may be rendered, a pit that sounds by reason of its great depth. We are deeply sunk in *depravity*, or evil propensities—for we are at enmity against God, our parent, benefactor, and redeemer, Rom. viii. 7. We are deeply sunk in *transgression*; for we have expressed the enmity of our hearts against God, by wilful rebellion against him in our lives, Dan. ix. 9, 10. We are deeply sunk in *condemnation*; for we are under the curse of God, Gal. iii. 10; and the sentence of eternal death, Ezek. xviii. 20. We are deeply sunk in *misery*; for the pit into which we have fallen is a horrible one. The darkness of ignorance—the pangs of remorse—and the agitations of guilty fear—all concur to produce the most dreadful horror, Ps. cxix. 120.

2. *It is a state of total defilement*. The miry clay of sin defiles *all the*

faculties of the sinner's mind;—unto them that are defiled and unbelieving nothing is pure; but even their mind and conscience is defiled, Tit. i. 15;—their understandings, wills, and affections are corrupted—and out of the evil treasure of their hearts, they bring forth evil things. Consequently sin defiles—all the powers of the *sinner's body*. These also are yielded as instruments of unrighteousness unto sin, Rom. vi. 13; so that we are all as an unclean thing, Isa. lxiv. 6.

3. *It is a state of imminent danger.* While we remain in this horrible pit certain destruction awaits us. Destruction *awaits* us—for we have justly merited it by our sin, Rom. vi. 23—and it is justly threatened by a holy God, Prov. x. 20. And destruction is *certain* if we remain here, for the earnest of it is already given us, John iii. 36.

4. *It is a state of utter helplessness.* As, with respect to the perishing object here described, the pit into which he is sunk is so deep, that the top of it is far above his reach—the clay so confines his feet that he cannot climb—if help come to him it must be from above—and he cannot expect deliverance, unless he obtains it by earnest cries;—so it is with perishing sinners. Salvation is *above* the reach of human efforts, Ps. cxxx. 4, and cxlii. 2;—our help can come only from *heaven*, Ps. cxxi. 1, 2; and we cannot obtain deliverance unless we cry for it, Ezek. xxxvi. 37. This we learn also from the words of our text, which teach us,

II. OUR DUTY AS THE SUBJECTS OF A DIVINE REDEEMER. This we learn from David's example, "I waited," &c. Like him,

1. *We must make "the Lord" the object of our pursuit*; for the salvation which we need consists in the enjoyment of God. Being exposed to destruction, we need his *delivering mercy*, Ps. xvi. 4.—Being defiled, we need his *purifying influence*, Ps. li. 10.—Being deeply fallen, we need his *restoring grace* to raise us, Ps. cxlii. 6, 7.—As it is from the Lord alone that salvation cometh, so like David,

2. *We must wait for the Lord.* This must be done,—By *penitent application* to him, like the prodigal, Luke xv. 18, 19.—By *earnest application*; we must cry to him, Jer. xxix. 13.—By *confident dependence*,—on the foundation laid by God, Isa. xxviii. 16,—and on the promises made by him, Heb. x. 19, 22. Like David,

3. *We must wait patiently for the Lord.* Patient waiting implies,—*Humble consciousness* and *acknowledgment* of our *demerit*, Gen. xxxii. 10.—*Entire resignation* to God's method of operation on our minds; that he may dispense his saving benefits and comforts as he pleases, Ps. lxxviii. 40, 41.—*Unfainting perseverance* in seeking him, Luke xi. 9, and xviii. 1—7. According to these promises, the words of our text teach us,

III. OUR PRIVILEGES AS GOSPEL PENITENTS. These we learn from David's success, "He inclined unto me," &c. As gospel penitents expect,

1. *An interest in God's gracious regards.* He will incline unto you.—He will incline his ear to your cry, Prov. xv. 8; Ps. cxlv. 18, 19.—He will incline his heart to compassionate your misery, Ps. ciii. 8, 13.—He will incline his hand to save and help you, Matt. xiv. 30, 31; Isa. xli. 10.

2. *Expect the enjoyment of most desirable favors.* Even—complete *deliverance* from danger and pollution; "He will bring you," &c., Ps. xci. 14—16:—firm *establishment* on the rock, Christ, Ps. xvi. 8; 1 Peter v. 10:—and sacred *consolation*; he will put the new song into your mouth; that which David sings, Ps. ciii. 2, 3;—and Isaiah predicts, Isa. xii. 1, 2.

3. *Expect a capacity for extensive usefulness.* "Many shall see it," &c.—When divine grace is enjoyed, it may and should be *seen*, Acts xi. 23;

Isa. ix. 1.—When the grace of God is seen in its effects and fruits, it leads those who behold it to glorify God, Matt. v. 16.

In applying this subject, recollect,

1. *The suitableness of gospel salvation to our natural state.* We are fallen, polluted, weak, and miserable; and by this salvation, we are raised, purified, strengthened, and comforted, 1 Cor. i. 30; Col. ii. 9, 10.

2. *The necessity of waiting for God,* in order that we may obtain his saving benefits. This he expressly requires of us, Ps. xxxvii. 34.

3. *The certain success of gospel penitents:* from God's declaration, Lam. iii. 26:—from his kindness to all such, Luke xi. 10; and from his perfections, Rom. x. 12; Ps. c. 5. "The Lord is good," &c.

SUBMISSION TO GOD

James iv. 7.—Submit yourselves therefore to God. (Sk.)

JAMES WAS accustomed to deliver his instructions in laconic sentences, where little was said, but much meant; the words few, but the sense comprehensive and important: a very cursory perusal of this epistle will sufficiently confirm the truth of this observation. The text however may be considered as a practical illustration of it; "Submit yourselves therefore to God." In order to profit by this highly important admonition we will endeavor to,

I. EXPLAIN THE NATURE OF THE SUBMISSION HERE ENJOINED

II. URGE THE REASONS FOR REDUCING IT TO PRACTICE.

I. EXPLAIN THE NATURE OF THE SUBMISSION HERE ENJOINED.

1. *We should submit to God in his authoritative sway.* God is a great King, "and his kingdom ruleth over all:" as a sovereign, he hath revealed laws, sanctioned by the highest authority, founded in immutable justice, and conducive to human happiness; to these laws we should submit, by forsaking sin, believing in Christ, reverencing God, loving our neighbor, &c.

2. *We should submit to God in his gracious influences.* God is the God of Grace. His Spirit strives with man, illuminates his understanding, convinces him of sin, subdues his will, and sanctifies his affections. "Submit yourselves therefore to God." His Spirit may be quenched, the light that is in you may become darkness, "I have called, and ye refused," &c. Prov. i. 24. In submitting to God, prize the teachings of his Spirit, cherish his holy influences, covet earnestly the best gifts, and shun whatever will wound your consciences, or vex the Holy One of Israel.

3 *Submit yourselves to God in his providential dispensations.* Your circumstances are various: some are afflicted in body—some are oppressed with poverty—others sustain painful bereavements. Here you are too frequently accustomed to murmur, to look at the situations of others with envy, and to entertain unworthy thoughts of God. But submission becomes you; it is God who afflicts, and he doeth it in mercy; cease therefore to complain, and humbly acquiesce in all his dispensations. This submission should be *voluntary*. There is a willing, and a forced submission. God will humble every man, either by his grace or justice; but we should willingly submit our understandings to his instructions, &c. It should be *universal*; there is a submission due to parents by children to masters by

servants, to princes by subjects, to husbands by wives, but these submissions are partial and temporary; but the submission in the text is universal; it admits of no exceptions, and knows no limits. It should be *constant*, at all times, in all circumstances, and in all situations.

II. URGE THE REASONS FOR REDUCING IT TO PRACTICE.

1. *We urge it from a consideration of the greatness and goodness of the Being to whom you are called to submit.* It is God, whose greatness is unsearchable, and whose power is infinite; who is above all and through all, and in you all; whose goodness is equal to his power, and whose will is holy, just and good.

2. *We urge it on the ground of relationship and obligation.* God is your Creator, you are his creatures; God is your Father, you are his children; God is the Sovereign, you are his subjects: submission therefore becomes you. In addition to this, you owe your all to God; your life, and clothes, and food; your personal and relative comforts all come from Him: gratitude therefore should bind you to submit to God.

3. *We urge it for the sake of your personal happiness.* Happiness supposes the removal of guilt from the conscience: submit to God's method of saving sinners, and you will be justified by faith. It supposes the regeneration of the nature; submit to the influences of the Holy Ghost, and you will be "born again of the Spirit," &c. It supposes internal tranquility: submit to God, and you will experience "the eternal sunshine of the spotless mind."

4. *We urge it from a consideration of the punishment which inevitably follows the crime of non-submission to God.* There is not one truth within the whole compass of religion more incontestably proved than this, that God will punish his enemies; and a refusing to submit to God, is the surest proof of personal enmity to him. The original sin of Adam, "that brought death into the world and all our wo," was non-submission; and the crime of apostate spirits was of the same description; and those who refuse to submit to God, must be punished by him, Luke xxi. 27.

The text should *suggest an inquiry*, Do we submit to God? Alas! how little submission there is to God in the world! Some violate his laws—others reject his counsel—others murmur at his providence. What is our character?—The text should *produce conviction*. We have all been found among the number of those who have neglected to submit to God; this should teach us our *folly*, our *ingratitude*, and our *danger*; and it should also excite deep remorse, genuine humility, &c. The text should *direct our conduct*. What else need we *know*, than how to submit to God? What *else* need we *do*, than practice this submission? What *else* need we *covet to enjoy*, than a consciousness of having submitted to God?

SUBMISSION TO BEREAVING PROVIDENCES.

Job i. 21.—The Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away, blessed be the name of the Lord. (Pr.)

THE affliction and the patience of Job are set before us as an example, and there is scarcely any case that can occur, but something in his complicated trials will be found to correspond with it. His afflictions were sent,

not so much in consequence of any particular sin, as for the trial of his faith. God is represented as glorying in him, and satan answers by alleging that his religion was all founded in self-interest. The Lord therefore consents that trial should be made: the trial was made, and it turned to the honor of Job.

However painful any affliction may be, while we are exercised by it, yet when it is over we often perceive that all was wise and good; at least we see it so in others. In Job's trials in particular, God was glorified, satan confounded, and the sufferer comes forth as gold.

That which supported him under all, was the power of religion, the value of which is never more known than in the day of adversity. This is the armor of God, which enables us to stand in the evil day; and having done all, to stand. That which enabled Job to take every thing well at the hand of God, was the love he bore to his holy name; and that name he blessed and adored, under all his bereavements.

There are two things in the text particularly worthy of notice:—The spirit of submission exemplified in the conduct of Job, and the principles on which that submission was founded.

I. THE SPIRIT OF SUBMISSION, UNDER BEREAVING PROVIDENCES, EXEMPLIFIED IN THE CONDUCT OF JOB.

There are several particulars in this case which serve to show the greatness and severity of Job's affliction, and the aboundings of the grace of God towards him, which enabled him to endure it all with so much meekness and submission.

1. The *Degree of his afflictions*. The objects taken away were more than were left, and seemed to leave him nothing to comfort him; his whole substance, his whole family, excepting one who only served to increase his distress. After this he is grievously afflicted in his own person: still he is submissive and resigned: chap. ii. 10.— — — We may have had our losses, in property, in children, and in valuable friends; but we have not lost our all. We have also had personal affliction, but it has been mixed with mercy; not like Job's unattended with any alleviating circumstance.

2. His trouble came upon him *suddenly and unexpectedly*, and completely reversed his former circumstances.— — — It was all in one day, and that a day of feasting too, when every thing appeared promising around him. Prosperity and adversity are like two opposite climates: men can live in almost any temperature, if but inured to it; but sudden reverses are insupportable. Hence it is we feel most for those who have seen better days when they fall into poverty and want.— — — Yet we see that Job calmly submitted to all his trials and bereavements, and even blessed the name of the Lord. And shall not we copy his example? We have never experienced his trials, nor does God usually deal thus with any of his people; his strokes are more gradual, and less severe than in the present instance. We often witness the dying pains and sorrows of our friends, till they and we are made willing to part; thus the load is gradually diminished, so that we are able to bear it. But it was not so with Job, and therefore his submission is the more remarkable.

3. Though Job was eminently pious, it is doubtful whether *his children were so* in any degree, and this would render the bereavement far more severe.— — — It is a great alleviation to our affliction, when those who are removed by death have given us reason to hope that they are now with God, and that they sleep in Jesus. But this consolation appears to have been denied to Job, who in the day of his calamity had manifested a godly jeal-

ousy over his children, which indicated his apprehension that all was not right, chap. i. 5: and how much this must have added to his affliction cannot be described. Yet we hear him say, The Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away: blessed be the name of the Lord.

4. His submission also appears in a *holy moderation* which attended his griefs.— — —A man of no religion would have been distracted, or have sunk in sullen despair. A heathen would have cursed his gods, and perhaps have committed suicide, being filled with rage and disappointment.— — — But Job, fully sensible of his affliction, and feeling it in every point, still in patience possesses his soul. He rises from the earth, rends his mantle, shaves his head, and prostrates himself before the Lord.

5. Amidst all his sorrow and distress, he preserves a holy resolution *to think well of God*, and even blesses his holy name.— — — Losses and trials are sent to prove us, and we have no more religion than we actually possess and manifest in the day of affliction. If half that religion so generally professed were submitted to this test, it would be found lamentably deficient; and this probably is the reason why some towering professors feel so little for their brethren in adversity.

II. THE PRINCIPLES ON WHICH JOB'S SUBMISSION WAS EVIDENTLY FOUNDED.

There is something in the meek and humble resignation of a good man in the day of trouble, very different from that of other persons. Some sort of patience and submission is found amongst men in general, but not like that which real piety produces. There is the patience of despair, and a submission to fate; but Job's was of a very different description.

1. He considers *all that befel him as God's doing*, and this calms and quiets his spirit.— — — He overlooks instruments and second causes, which would have given to his losses the character of injuries, and have filled him with indignation; and therefore he does not say the Chaldeans and Sabeans had done him this injustice, but "the Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away." Seeing and confessing his hand, answered every objection: and however trying to the dispensation, it is the Lord, let him do what seemeth him good.— — — This is true submission, to have no will of our own, but to have it lost and swallowed up in the will of God, even in those things that are most contrary to our natural inclination. "I opened not my mouth," said David, "because thou didst it."

2. He recollects that *all he had was from the hand of God*; that it was merely a gift, or rather lent for a time, to be employed for his glory.— — — "The Lord gave," says the patient sufferer. These cattle, these children were not mine, though I called them so: in taking them away the Lord has only resumed his own, and left me as I was before, naked as from the dust I came.

3. He feels thankful that they were *once given him to enjoy*, though now they are taken from him.— — — Supposing we are not allowed to enjoy our mercies for ever, or without interruption; were they not mercies while we did enjoy them? We may see reason to bless God that ever we had property, or children, or friends to enjoy, and that we possessed any of them so long as we did; though now, by the will of providence, we are deprived of them all.

4. Even when bereaved of every earthly comfort, he considers God as *worthy of his gratitude and adoration*.— — — Job could bless the hand that took away, as well as the hand that gave; and this must have been a special act of faith. We may not be able at present to see the mercy con-

tained in any of our bereavements, yet in the end we may see it, as was the case with Jacob, when Joseph was sold into Egypt. But Job already sees enough to assure him, that all his afflictions should be overruled for good, and should promote his spiritual and eternal welfare.

REFLECTIONS.

1. How wise then and how needful, to choose the better part which shall never be taken from us; to set our affections on things above, where all is durable and lasting; and not on things on the earth, which are all fading from our sight, and quickly passing away.

2. Afflictions, if not sanctified, will only tend to aggravate our guilt. They are the voice of God, calling us from earth and sense; the discipline which our heavenly Father employs, to make us partakers of his holiness; and if despised or disregarded, will leave us worse than we were before.

3. The example of Job teaches us that a spirit of despondency and discontent in a time of trial, is utterly inconsistent with true religion; yet how many there are that faint in the day of adversity, and who, instead of deriving consolation and support from the promises of the gospel, are utterly inconsolable, and sink into gloom and despondency.

4. While we admire the patience and submission of Job, we cannot but abhor the unfeeling conduct of his friends, who with only a small proportion of his piety could pass unwarrantable censures upon his character, and withhold from him those succors which humanity itself demanded. Job vi. 14.

PAUL'S PRAYER FOR HIS COUNTRYMEN.

Rom. x. 1.—Brethren, my heart's desire and prayer to God for Israel is, that they might be saved. (Pr.)

PAUL's conversion subjected him to the suspicion that he was an enemy to his country, a disaffected man, and of a most uncharitable judgment concerning his brethren, the Jews. This is no uncommon thing, though it is somewhat strange that a man cannot embrace the gospel, and begin to love Christ supremely, but he must immediately be suspected of the want of love towards mankind. Paul however repels the charge with the most solemn attestation, appealing to the Searcher of hearts for the sincerity of his motives, and for the ardent love he bore to his countrymen. Rom. ix. 1—3. In return for all their unkindness towards him, he longs and prays for their salvation; and in this he imitates the example of his blessed Lord, who desired the forgiveness of his murderers. It is christianity alone that can inspire such sentiments, and give such an example to the world.

I. ENQUIRE WHAT IT WAS THAT MADE THE APOSTLE SO DESIROUS OF THE SALVATION OF HIS COUNTRYMEN.

1. He considered *the danger they were in of perishing*, and being lost for ever — — — Had there been no danger, and religion were only a matter of opinion, there would have been no need for such anxious solicitude. But a good man beholds multitudes all around him going on in darkness, he foresees the consequences that must follow, and is anxious if possible to avert them — — — Paul also knew the terrors of the Lord, he considered the import of the threatenings, was assured of their certainty, and that God was in real earnest, however poor thoughtless sinners might be disposed to trifle.

When Aaron saw men dying of the plague in the Israelitish camp, he ran in with a censer before the Lord, and stood between the living and the dead. Paul in like manner interposed his labors and his prayers to save his impenitent countrymen from eternal ruin, and every real christian will do the same.

2. *The love of Christ* constrained him to seek the salvation of souls, and to labor for their welfare.— — —He considered what Christ had done in giving himself for us; what humiliation, what sufferings, and what an ignominious death he had endured for our sakes; and the heart of this holy apostle was touched with the example, and stimulated to every exertion for the salvation of souls. 2 Cor. v. 14, 15.

3. *The magnitude of salvation itself*, is sufficient to justify all the anxiety which the apostle manifested.— — —Who can tell how great this salvation is, or what the soul is capable of suffering or enjoying in the eternal world? A period may arrive when the suffering of one soul shall be greater than that of the whole creation, from the beginning to the end of time; and who then can conceive of the unutterable importance of an interest in the salvation of the gospel?— — —Something of it may be seen in the price paid for our redemption, and in the bitter agonies of Christ in the garden and on the cross; but there is a depth in his sorrows which we cannot fathom, a dignity and a glory in his person which transcends our highest conceptions.

4. The apostle was influenced by a concern for *the glory of God*, which is inseparably connected with the salvation of sinners.— — —There is joy in heaven over a sinner that repenteth, and joy on earth; and the father of the prodigal rejoices that his lost son is found. When a sinner is brought to submit to God's government, to bear his image and likeness, and is received into the bosom of his family, the riches of his grace are illustrated, and his glory revealed. The conversion and salvation of sinners are the reward of Christ's sufferings, the travail of his soul, which he was to see, to his joy and satisfaction. Paul therefore, and every other true believer, would long for the salvation of souls, that Christ might be glorified.

5. There were *some peculiar reasons* in the present case, that so powerfully awakened the apostle's sympathy, and which it will be proper briefly to notice—

1. It is natural for a christian to feel especially for the souls of *his own countrymen*, who have a more immediate claim upon his regard; and this was the case with Paul. Persons who inhabit the same part of the world, or live in the same neighborhood, contract that sort of partiality which the love of country creates; and it is not the office of religion to destroy, but to improve and elevate those sympathies, by imparting to them its own benevolent qualities. Hence our Lord felt for Jerusalem more than for any other city; and Paul for "Israel," because they were his own people. Luke xix. 41, 42.

2. Among his countrymen he had *numerous acquaintances*, whom he saw to be in danger of perishing through unbelief, and it was natural he should feel much on their account. When we look around and see many of those with whom we spent our early days, and formed our earliest intimacies, still strangers to the gospel; and walking according to the course of this world, we cannot but lament their unhappy condition, and long to see them brought home to God.

3. We are led to feel more still for our *near relations and friends*, if any of them are left in the gall of bitterness, and in the bonds of iniquity. This can never fail to be the case, where religion has its proper influence on the heart. Our brethren, our parents, our children, must necessarily lie near

our hearts, and the thoughts of an eternal separation is insupportable. Jeremiah was pained at his very heart, and his bowels were troubled within him, to think of the destruction of Jerusalem; but how much more, to think of the destruction of soul and body in hell. Moses could not endure to leave Hobab his father-in-law behind him in the wilderness; nor could David contemplate the destruction of his rebellious son, without being overwhelmed with grief. Neither could Paul view the state of many of "his kinsmen according to the flesh, without having great heaviness and continual sorrow of heart." Rom. ix. 1—3.

II. BRIEFLY NOTICE THE MEANS WHICH THE APOSTLE EMPLOYED FOR THE CONVERSION AND SALVATION OF HIS COUNTRYMEN.

If we use no means, it is a proof, that our desire for the salvation of others is not sincere.

1. Paul labored incessantly *in word and doctrine*, to bring them to the knowledge of the truth; and he did this amidst reproaches, necessities, and persecutions; encountering every difficulty and discouragement, that he might win them to Christ. Acts xx. 19—21. And though we may not be called to public services, we are required to bear witness to the truth, and meekly to instruct those who oppose themselves, in the hope that repentance may be given to them. 2 Tim. ii. 25. An admonition seasonably and prudently administered, has in many instances been attended with good effect.

2. A holy and *exemplary life*, adorning the doctrine of God our Saviour in all things, is a blessed means of fixing the attention of others upon the reality and importance of religion; and Paul did not fail to exemplify the doctrine which he preached. 2 Cor. i. 12; 1 Thess. ii. 10. If we desire, therefore, the salvation of those around us, let them see our good works, and glorify our father who is in heaven. 1 Pet. iii. 1, 2.

3. Fervent and *importunate prayer*. Though we cannot command success, God can give it; and if we were more fervent in prayer, our labors would be more successful. Primitive christians abounded in this holy exercise, and Paul himself affords an illustrious example: "Brethren, my heart's desire and prayer for Israel is, that they might be saved."

LOVE TO THE BRETHREN.

John xv. 12.—This is my commandment, That ye love one another, as I have loved you. (H. H.)

THE law and the gospel are in perfect unison with each other: the law, *as a covenant*, sends us to the gospel, that we may obtain mercy with God; and the gospel sends us back again to the law, *as a rule of life*, that, by obeying its commands, we may honor and glorify our God. The loving our neighbor as ourselves was enjoined by the law, and indeed was a summary of all the duties of the second table.* Our blessed Lord, enjoining the same duty from new considerations, calls it "a new commandment," and emphatically *his* commandment; that so we may be led to examine it with stricter attention, and to regard it with deeper reverence: he says, in effect, Labor constantly to fulfil that old commandment of the law; and,

* Compare Lev. xix. 18, with Rom. xiii. 8—10, & Gal. v. 14.

that you may never want either a directory to guide, or a motive to animate, you in your exertions, take my love to you as the *reason* and *pattern* of your love to each other.

To elucidate his words, we shall shew,

I. HOW CHRIST HAS LOVED US—

We must, of course, content ourselves with a few hints only of a subject, which has a height and depth, and length and breadth that can never be comprehended, never explored. Consider then the love of Christ to us:

1. How free!

Who ever did any thing to it? It exerted itself towards us long before we had any existence in the world. Who can do any thing *now* to merit it? We deserve to forfeit it every day and hour; but to earn an interest in it is beyond the power of man. We have nothing of our own but sin; and that would be a poor price to pay for the love of Christ. Indeed, if we deny the freeness of his grace, we rob him of the brightest jewel in his crown.

2. How tender!

There is not one of his people, nowever weak and afflicted, whom he does not watch over with more than parental tenderness, "carrying the lambs in his bosom, and gently leading them that are with young." Yes: "we have not an High-priest who cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities:" "in all our afflictions He is afflicted:" if we are stricken by the hand of persecution, He feels the blow, Acts ix. 4: "he that toucheth us, toucheth the apple of His eye." In every possible state he sympathizes with us, as a head with the members, and never fails to succour us with "grace sufficient for us."

3. How abundant!

If we regarded only the temporal blessings we receive at his hands, we must confess his love to us to be very abundant. But who can contemplate his unwearied intercessions at the right hand of his Father, or the incessant communications of his Spirit to their souls, and not stand amazed at the exceeding riches of his grace and love? And besides all this, he is "preparing mansions for us in his Father's house," and training us up daily, that we may be counted worthy to inhabit them for ever and ever. Well is his love represented as "passing knowledge!" Eph. iii. 10.

4. How costly!

Free as his love was to us, it was not exercised by him but at an expense that exceeds all calculation. Before it could operate for our advantage, he must leave his heavenly glory, assume our fallen nature, endure the scoffs and insults of his own creatures, and "pour out his soul unto death" as a sacrifice for sin. And would he pay this amazing price, in order to redeem our souls from death and hell? Yes, he undertook and executed the mighty work; and never drew back till he could say, "It is finished."

From contemplating this stupendous mystery, let us proceed to inquire,

II. IN WHAT RESPECTS HIS LOVE TO US IS A PATTERN FOR OUR LOVE TO EACH OTHER—

The love which the saints should bear to each other is of a sublime nature, very different from that which they owe to the world around them.* To resemble that of Christ to us, it should be,

1. Disinterested—

Our love to the saints should not be confined to those of the same church

*The two are carefully distinguished from each other. Gal. vi. 10; 1 Pet. ii. 17.

or party, nor should it have respect to any pleasure or advantage that we expect to derive from them; for this is only a refined species of self-love, Matt. v. 46, 47: it should respect them only as children of our heavenly Father, as members of Christ our living Head, and as joint-heirs of the same eternal glory. It should be proportioned to their piety, rather than to any other endowments; and be occupied in advancing their happiness, not only as much as our own, but oftentimes in preference to our own. It was thus that the love of Christ operated towards us; and it is proposed for our imitation more especially in this point of view; "Mind not every one his own things, but every one also the things of others. Let this be in you which was also in Christ Jesus." Phil. ii. 4, 5.

2. Sympathizing—

We are all passing through a vale of tears, "born to trouble as the sparks fly upward." Hence we need each other's care and assistance through the whole of our lives. The kindness of friendship is a remedy which God has put within our reach, to enhance our joys and to alleviate our sorrows: we should therefore enter into the concerns of others, and feel them as our own; "weeping with them that weep, and rejoicing with them that rejoice." By this, we are told, we shall more especially comply with the injunction in the text; "Bear ye one another's burthens," says the Apostle, "and so fulfil the law of Christ." Gal. vi. 2.

3. Beneficent—

Love must not interest merely the feelings of the mind: it must exert itself in acts correspondent to the occasions on which it is exercised. Is our neighbor distressed? we must relieve him: Is he ignorant? we must instruct him: Is he weak? we must strengthen him: Is he fallen? we must raise him up: Has he shewn some infirmities? we must bear with him. Has he offended us? we must forgive him. Are there any opportunities whatever of doing him good? we must gladly and speedily embrace them. It is in this way also that the Apostle urges us to imitate our Lord and Saviour: "Put on, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, bowels of mercies, humbleness of mind, meekness, long-suffering; forbearing one another, and forgiving one another, *even as Christ forgave you*, so also do ye." Col. iii. 12, 13.

4. Self-denying—

That love which will exert itself only in things that are easy and pleasing to oneself, is not worthy the name of love. A truly christian affection will lead one to "condescend to men of low estate;" to visit the chambers of the sick; to enter into the dungeon of the prisoner; to cut off some of one's superfluities in order to supply the necessities of others; to do good in return for evil; to expose oneself to the derision of a thoughtless world, in order to be instrumental in turning some of them from the evil of their ways; and "to lay down, if need be, even our own lives for the brethren." This was the way in which St. Paul manifested his love, 1 John iii. 16; and in which we also after the example of our Lord, are called to manifest ours. Phil. ii. 17, 18.

This being the way in which our love may resemble his, we shall shew you,

III. THE OBLIGATION WE ARE UNDER TO FOLLOW THAT PATTERN—

Our blessed Lord has enjoined a conformity to him in these respects,

1. As an act of obedience to him—

He does not *recommend* such love as decorous and beneficial, but *commands* it as a duty which he will on no account dispense with. He stamps

his own authority upon it; intimating thereby that he will make it a subject of particular inquiry in the day of judgment. Indeed the decision at the last day is represented as turning principally upon this point; they who for his sake have abounded in offices of love being made *exclusively* the objects of his favor, while they who have neglected them are marked as objects of his indignation and abhorrence. If therefore we have any regard to his authority, or any dread of his everlasting displeasure, we must see the importance of following the example of his love.

2. As an evidence of our love to him—

Having in another place enforced this duty in terms similar to the text, he adds, that the exercise of brotherly love is the distinctive badge of our profession, the habit whereby all his followers must be known. 1 John xiii. 34, 35. To the same effect his loving and beloved disciple also speaks, declaring that our profession of love to God is mere hypocrisy without this, 1 John iv. 20; and that without this we can have no assurance, no evidence, that we have passed from death unto life. 1 John iii. 14, 17, 19. Shall we then at once write "*Hypocrite*" upon our foreheads? Shall we be contented to be ranked with "murderers, who certainly have not eternal life abiding in them?" 1 John iii. 15. If not, we must see the necessity of imitating Christ, who "has left us an example that we should follow his steps."

INFER,

1. How little true religion is there in the world!

So far is love to the saints from being the common disposition of mankind, that almost all are rather filled with hatred against them: and where candor prevails over the enmity of the human heart so as to subdue its workings, there yet is a total want of that disinterested, sympathizing, beneficent, and self-denying love, which characterizes a true christian.———

2. What reason have even the saints themselves to be ashamed before God!

Let the most zealous and active christian compare his love with that of Christ: how poor and defective will his best efforts appear! Alas! alas! how often are things found among professing christians that are not only defective, but directly contrary to love! Beloved brethren, let us study more carefully St. Paul's description of love, 1 Cor. xiii: and above all, let us contemplate more the love of Christ to us; so shall we feel its constraining influence, and be stimulated to the exercise of this delightful duty

SUPERIOR IMPORTANCE OF RELIGIOUS ENGAGEMENTS. (Pr.)

Neh. vi. 3.—I am doing a great work, so that I cannot come down.

Nehemiah was truly engaged in a great work, and was chiefly employed in effecting the reformation of Israel, after their return from Babylon. Such also was his magnanimity, that he could not be content to live in a court, while Jerusalem lay waste. He comes to the holy city with the returning captives, and begins to rebuild its walls with all his might. The greatness of the work however did not consist merely in rebuilding the walls, but in the important ends to be answered by it; it was the city of the living God, and the seat of public worship. Yet no sooner had he commenced the un-

dertaking, than he meets with opposition. Some of the neighboring heathen tried to put him in fear; they also allured him, in the hope of diverting him from his purpose; but to all these he answered as in the text.

The conduct of Nehemiah on this occasion is worthy of example, and in this view we may apply it to ourselves.

I. CONSIDER THE CHRISTIAN AS ENGAGED IN A GREAT AND ARDUOUS WORK.

Though it is not in every respect like that of Nehemiah, it bears some relation to it. There are many great undertakings in the world, and many works of art which men call great; but they dwindle into insignificance, when compared with the work in which Christians are engaged. The cause of God in the world is of unspeakable importance, and the soul of man is of more consequence than the whole material creation.

More particularly—

1. Every christian is represented *as engaged in a race*, as running for an immortal prize, and this is an arduous undertaking.— — —It is no great thing indeed to enter upon the race; many do that who never win the prize. It is easy to set out in the ways of God, and to go on till we meet with some difficulty or some temptation: but it is a great matter “so to run as to obtain,” and to “endure to the end.” This requires no ordinary degree of zeal and fidelity. 1 Cor. ix. 24—27.

2. Christians are engaged in *an arduous contest with all the powers of darkness*, and wrestle not merely with flesh and blood.— — —It requires but little courage to begin the contest; many do that who are overcome at last. Many put on the harness who do not put it off with honor, and endure for a time only, till overcome by some great temptation. But to fight the good fight of faith, and to lay hold on eternal life, is indeed an arduous enterprise. Here no success can be expected, unless we are made strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might. Oh to be faithful unto death, to finish our course with joy, and to be more than conquerors through him that loved us! Eph. vi. 10—13.

3. They are *engaged in the work of saving others*, as well as in seeking their own salvation.— — —Real christians do not wish to go to heaven alone; seeking the good of others is of the essence of true religion. No man is converted for his own sake, but that he may bring others to the knowledge of the truth; and when the Lord blesses his people, it is that they may become a blessing. Luke viii. 39. And what are all the works of men, compared with the salvation of an immortal soul, and seeking the everlasting welfare of those about us?

4. The proper employment of a christian is *the spread of the gospel*, and carrying on the cause of God in the world.— — —This is the work in which the prophets and apostles were engaged, in which Christ himself was engaged, and for the accomplishment of which the whole system of providence is directed. The work committed to Moses and Aaron was but a faint emblem of this, and the work in which Nehemiah and Ezra were engaged was all preparatory to it. The labors of the apostles and early christians were all employed in laying the foundation; it is for us to raise the superstructure, and to bring forth the topstone with shoutings, Grace, grace unto it.

II THE WORK IN WHICH WE ARE ENGAGED IS SURE TO MEET WITH OPPOSITION, and it becomes us not to be diverted from it, but to say with Nehemiah, “I am doing a great work, and cannot come down.”

God's work must be first and chiefly regarded, it must be our supreme

end, and all others subordinated to it. Many are convinced that the concerns of the soul are of the greatest importance; they know that they must be converted, must be born again, must be brought to repentance, or perish everlastingly; and they fully intend to seek the Lord, but at present it is not convenient, for something hinders. Thus it is with many a thoughtless youth, who sees and feels his danger; and with many a busy tradesman, who would attend to the concerns of his soul, but urgent worldly calls prevent. Thus alas it is too frequently with the real christian, when tempted to the neglect of duty. But how much better is the answer of Nehemiah to all such impediments: I am doing a great work, and cannot come down.

1. In particular, *christians are engaged in seeking the Lord*, in waiting upon him in secret; and when they would draw near at the appointed season, something in the family, or in a way of business intervenes, and the work of God is suspended. But all these things should be regarded as an effort of the enemy to draw us aside from the path of duty, and cause the work of God to cease. Let us rather say with Abraham, "Tarry ye here, while I go up yonder to worship;" or answer like Nehemiah in the text.

3. Christians are employed in *relieving the distressed*, and in contributing to the support of the cause of God: but when they think of doing these things, some temptation is apt to present itself in order to prevent. We can do but little good without some self-denial, and if not prepared for this, the work of God must cease.

3. While engaged in doing good, *we are exposed to injuries from men*, as Ezra and Nehemiah were. There will always be some Tobiah or Sanballat, who will seek to hinder the work of God, but it behoves us to regard them not. When Whitfield was persecuted and abused for preaching in a seaport town, previous to his departure for Georgia, he was advised by his friends to stop and prosecute the offenders: but he replied that he had no time for such an undertaking, he must be about his Master's business.

4. The *enjoyments of life* too often call off our attention, or unfit us for religious duties. Of these we must beware; and if truly engaged for God, we shall have no time to lose in mere worldly amusements, but shall find enough in religion to engage all our time and all our thoughts. The work of God is great and large, and demands all our energies, and all our strength.

IMPROVEMENT.

1. Let christians be careful to guard against a light and trifling spirit, as totally incompatible with the solemn duties of christianity, and the right improvement of time.

2. Let the thoughtless sinner well consider the consequence of continuing to neglect the great concerns of his soul. How ready will such be another day to curse the vanities which led them to ruin and perdition. **Seek the Lord while he may be found, and call upon him while he is near.**

MOTIVES TO CHRISTIAN DILIGENCE.

Eccles. ix. 10.—Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with thy might; for there is no work, nor device, nor knowledge, nor wisdom, in the grave whither thou goest. (Pr.)

THIS counsel comes with the greater force, from a man who himself had not been idle in his day, and much of whose zeal had been expended in building a house for God. It is true, that on reviewing many of his own labors, he saw much vanity attached to them; yet he did not mean by this to encourage despondency or inactivity, or he would not have used the urgent and impressive language of the text.

I. ILLUSTRATE AND EXPLAIN THE EXHORTATION.

Many things are said in scripture, especially in the New Testament, which may seem to depreciate the works of men, yet true religion is far from being unfriendly to good works.

Properly to understand this language, three or four things require to be noticed—

1. Nothing must be done with a view of *superceding the work of Christ*. If we think to gain the favor of God, or the forgiveness of our sins, by any works or doings of our own, we deceive ourselves, and stumble at the stumbling-stone. Rom. ix. 32. x. 3.

2. Whatever is done *must be done in faith*, in order to its being acceptable to God. When it was asked, what shall we do that we may work the works of God; the answer was, This is the work of God, that ye believe on him whom he hath sent. John vi. 28, 29. Without faith it is impossible to please God. Heb. xi. 6.

3. Whatever is done *must accord with the revealed will of God*, or we cannot be his servants. Worldly men would take up the words of the text, and go into every kind of evil; power and not justice, being the only principle that gives law to their conduct. But we are not at liberty to do as we please, so long as there is one Lawgiver, who is able to save and to destroy.

4. In selecting the objects of our zeal and labor, we must have a *special regard to what providence places within our reach*, or “whatsoever our hands find to do.” Many things may be within the reach of another, that come not within our sphere; and it is one of the vanities of human life to be always thinking of what we would do, if in other circumstances, while the good we might do is neglected or overlooked. Much depends on a proper selection of labor, according to the talents or opportunities we may enjoy. One may have wealth, and with that he may do much good. Another is poor, but he can pray, and give counsel. Another has wisdom or influence, and the liberal will devise liberal things. One can preach, and another can open a door for the gospel, in his town and neighborhood. One may contrive, and another execute. Moses and Aaron did well together, neither of them would have done so well apart. Paul was a preacher, and left others to baptize, while he carried the gospel round about unto Illyricum. Let us consider also how much is left undone in the world, in the church, in the family, in the neighborhood where we dwell, and what labors our hands might find to do.

5. Having found what to do, *we are required to do it with all our might*. This includes at least two things.— —1. That we do it *without delay*. Many things which our hands find to do at one time, may not be practicable at another; and therefore will not be done at all, if not done immediately. Opportunities are a call from God; they pass by, and return no more.— —

—2. That we do it in *good earnest*. If we look into the history of the church, we shall find that all the great things which have been done, were done by men who were in real earnest, and who labored with all their might. When God would redeem Israel, it was by one who was prepared to sacrifice a kingdom and a crown in his service, and who esteemed the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures of Egypt. And when he would bring his people into Canaan, it was by a man “who followed the Lord fully,” and who nobly said, “We are well able to go up and possess the land. Also when Jerusalem was to be rebuilt, it was by a man who put not off his clothes, and by a people who had a mind to work. And by whom was the gospel at first diffused throughout the earth? By men who counted not their lives dear unto them, that they might testify the gospel of the grace of God. By whom was the reformation undertaken in the sixteenth century? By such men as Luther, whose zeal and whose labors were indefatigable. By whom has the gospel been carried into foreign parts, and bibles distributed in all languages? By missionaries and by agents of a kindred spirit.

The motives by which the exhortation is enforced.

1. We are *hastening to the grave*. Every step we take, every hour we pass, we are going thither. Other things may be uncertain, as, whether we are going to heaven or hell; but this is certain nor do we know how soon we may reach the end of our journey.

2. When we come thither, *all our activity for God or man is at an end*: “for there is no work, nor device, nor knowledge, nor wisdom, in the grave whither thou goest.” There is no more to be done for the souls of men, nor for their temporal interest, nor for the cause of Christ in the world.

What a loud call then is this to *sinners*. Life is the only time to escape the wrath to come; this time is now in your hand, if you have but a heart to improve it. A door is now open, but by and by it will be shut for ever. The throne of grace is now accessible, but ere long it will be converted into a judgment seat. Christ is the way of life and salvation, but the way will be of no use when we have arrived at the end of our course, and the scene of life is closed for ever.

It is also a loud call to *christians*, to redeem the time, and live wholly to the Lord. There is much to do, and the time is short; let us therefore labor with renewed diligence, and be as those who wait for their Lord

THE CHRISTIAN WARFARE.

Ephesians vi. 11—13.—Put on the whole armor of God, that ye may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil: for we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places. Wherefore take unto you the whole armor of God, that ye may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand. (Pr.)

In the time of danger, when a powerful and malignant enemy is seeking our destruction, it would be natural to arm ourselves against him, that we may withstand the meditated attack. As christians we are engaged in a more important conflict than any pertaining to this world. “Wrestle not with flesh and blood,” not with mortal men like ourselves, but with evil spirits and evil things. Hence we are called to be on our guard, to put on

the armor which is provided for us, and to take good heed to the direction given us.

I. CONSIDER THE DANGER TO WHICH WE ARE EXPOSED: ver. 12.

As it is in other cases, so it is in this; our greatest danger lies in not feeling our danger, and so not being prepared to meet it.

1. View *the enemy* we have to contend with. He is one who bears an *inveterate hatred* against us, and seeks nothing less than our destruction or eternal overthrow.— — — He hates us as God's creatures, but especially as those who have been rescued from his power, and taken up arms against him: nothing now will satisfy him but our eternal ruin.— — — It is therefore a struggle of life for life: if we do not overcome him he will overcome us. It is in vain to think of being neuter, or making peace with him.

2. He is *mightier* than we are; and unless we have help from above, we are no match for him.— — — We know but little of the power of wicked spirits, abstractly considered; but viewed as the god of this world, satan has all its temptations in alliance with him.— — — We know what power there is in these: with these he has cast down many mighty, yea many strong men have been slain by him.— — — With these he overcame our first parents, and with these also he attacked the second Adam, though in vain.

3. He is an *artful enemy*.— — — We are told of the "wiles of the devil," hiding his designs, and falling upon us when we least expect it. We are in his net before we are aware, and when providence seems to smile upon us. Deut. viii. 12.— — — He studies our propensities, and suits his temptations to them. Ephes. iv. 14.

4. He is *invisible*.— — — If he were "flesh and blood," like ourselves, we might beware; but his influence is like the nightly pestilence, which walks in darkness.— — — When least suspected, danger is nigh.

5. He is *near us*, as it were within our gates. The safety of a nation menaced by an enemy, often depends on his being kept at a distance, by walls or seas, of fortresses of defence. But here it is supposed that the enemy has entered into our borders, and that we have no other resource left but to struggle as it were for life.— — — It is not a contest with a distant enemy, but a kind of closing conflict: "we wrestle."

6. What is still worse, he has a *strong party within us*.— — — He was victorious with our first parents, when this was not the case, and when he had no party within: much greater therefore is the danger now.— — — If we do not obtain the victory, we shall ourselves be overcome, and perish in the conflict.

7. On *the issue* of this warfare depend all our hopes.— — — If we "stand" not in this, our loss when defeated can never be retrieved.

II. THE ARMOR PROVIDED FOR US: ver. 13.

Three things may here be observed—

1. In general, this armor is *the grace of the gospel*, believed and trusted in: this is opposed to human might or strength: ver. 10.— — — In common warfare it is usual for the commanders to persuade their enemies to think highly of their strength: but in this it is quite the reverse. We must go as Israel was always taught to do, as having no might of our own, but deriving all our strength from the Lord. 2 Tim. ii. 2.

2. It is described as a *whole or perfect armor*, sufficient to defend us in every part.— — — "Truth" is the girdle to strengthen us: "righteousness" a breastplate: the "gospel" of peace as shoes, by which we shall be able to trample upon the lion and the adder, the young lion and the dragon; "faith" is a shield; "salvation," or the hope of eternal life a helmet.—

— — All this armor is to be drawn from the truths of the everlasting gospel.
 3. The *use to be made of it* is, that we may be able to “withstand,” and to face the enemy. There is no armor for the back: he that fleeth is wholly defenceless, and must inevitably fall.

III. THE NECESSITY OF “PUTTING ON” THIS ARMOR, OR “TAKING” IT TO OURSELVES: ver. 11.

Armor is of no avail, unless it be used. The application of the gospel is that which proves our security. — — — Some persons make no use of it, and others a bad use: but it must be our concern to make a good use of it. — — — Use it in prayer, in other duties, in afflictions, in temptations: its truths, its promises and directions, will avail us in the whole of our warfare.

IV. THE INDUCEMENT TO DO SO; “THAT WE MAY WITHSTAND IN THE EVIL DAY, AND HAVING DONE ALL, TO STAND.”

It is here supposed that there are times of *special danger*, called “the evil day.” — — — Times in which we are attacked with peculiar force; such as seasons of persecution and temptation. It was an evil day to Joseph, when solicited by his faithless mistress; but he successfully withstood. — — — It was an evil day to Nehemiah, when Sanballat and others came to hinder the work of the Lord; to our Saviour, when the prince of this world came against him; and to the martyrs when they had to resist even unto blood, striving against sin. — — — But they withstood in the evil day; and having done all, they were enabled to keep their ground.

Some of God’s servants, through neglecting their armor, have been *foiled* in the day of battle: of this there are many affecting examples.

The phrase, “having done all to stand,” is very impressive: this is to keep the field at last. It is this which gives decision to a battle: we may be overcome, but if we overcome at last, it will be well. — — — We may obtain a victory now and then, and yet be finally conquered; and “having done all,” to fall at last. — — — Oh of what importance is it to be finally victorious!

These weapons are not only necessary in the spiritual warfare, but also in temporal dangers; and though we may never be exposed to scenes of military conflict, we must all in some form or other have to encounter the king of terrors; and for this, nothing can prepare us but “taking to ourselves the whole armor of God.”

CHRISTIAN GENEROSITY.

Galatians vi. 2.—Bear ye one another’s burdens; and so fulfil the law of Christ. (Sk.)

“THE heart is deceitful above all things,” as well as “desperately wicked,” and is therefore to be watched over with the most scrupulous jealousy; otherwise there is danger, lest under the semblance of piety and religious zeal, we should be led to indulge rancorous and unholy passions. Thus the apostle seems to have thought, or rather to have felt: whence the *caution*, chap. v. 13—16: whence also the *exposure* of the fruits both of the flesh and the Spirit, ver. 19—23; and the *exhortation*, from chap. v. 25, to the text; in which we have an important duty, enforced by a powerful motive.

I. THE DUTY ENJOINED;—“Bear ye one another’s burdens.” The word “burden” denotes something which, by uneasy pressure, exhausts the

strength and spirits of the person who is oppressed by it; and it may apply,

1. *To a weight of labor or bodily toil.* This is the effect of the original transgression, Gen. iii. 19. Thus were the Israelites *burdened*, Exod. i. 11. The pressure of this kind of burdens we may bear for "one another" by manual assistance, which even the poorest may give, by procuring the requisite help, or pecuniary aid, which would render the *excess* of labor unnecessary.

2. *To a weight of personal affliction;* in which "the corruptible body presseth down the soul," and, as in Job's case, the patient is a burden to himself, Job vii. 20. The pressure of this may be relieved by medical aid, (which a little experience and attention would enable many, who have not been bred to the profession, to afford,)—by kind attendance,—the soothing, sympathizing language of friendship,—or the considerations which religion affords, Heb. x. iii. 2; James i. 27.

3. *To a weight of domestic afflictions and cares.* This was a part of Job's overwhelming case, chap. i. 13—19. Here our text particularly applies to members of families, who should "bear one another's burdens," by manifesting a fellow feeling, in promptly and cheerfully lending a helping hand to lighten the common load of pain and trouble; and in suggesting those encouragements which affection, reason or religion may furnish. Not so Job's wife, who by endeavoring to deprive him of his only remaining support, contributed to make his "stroke heavier than his groaning," chap. ii. 9, and xxiii. 2.

4. *To a weight of providential losses, poverty, embarrassment, oppression, &c.* In reference to this, the Lord directs, Isa. lviii. 6, to "undo the heavy burdens," &c. This may be effected by public subscription, Acts xxiv. 17; 1 Cor. xiv. 1—3; by private contributions, James ii. 15, 16;—by furnishing materials for industry to work upon;—by judicious advice, suitable encouragement, remonstrance with oppressors, &c. Isa. lviii. 6, 7; Job xxix. 11—13; 1 John iii. 16, 17.

5. *To a weight of guilt and corruption.* So the Psalmist, Ps. xxxviii. 4, "For mine iniquities are gone over my head; as a heavy burden they are too strong for me." In this case christian sympathy is particularly demanded. "A wounded spirit who can bear?" 'Tis true every convinced sinner must bear this load for himself; yet it is often in the power of others materially to assist such. You find one of this character on the brink of despair: long has he been thus; and he fears he shall never obtain mercy:—*a relation of your own past experience* may serve to show him that his case is not desperate. Another may be painful because his distress has not been more distressing, and is therefore afraid that his repentance is not genuine. Here the experience of such as have had their hearts gently "opened" may be of vast benefit, Acts xvi. 14, 29—34. In every case, we should point to "the Lamb of God," John i. 29; 1 John ii. 2; and bear their burdens in prayer *for* and *with* the humble penitents; and expound unto them the way of God more perfectly; Acts xviii. 26; showing, at once, the tenderness of the Saviour, Isa. xlii. 3, and the freeness and suitability of his salvation, Isa. liii. 4—6; Rom. iv. 5.

6. *To a weight of temptation.* This may come *immediately* from satan, Matt. iv. 1; or, *mediately*, from persecuting men, from the world generally, from family connections, from the church, Matt. x. 36; Phil. iii. 18. In this case also, when the soul is "in heaviness through manifold temptations," the exercise of christian prudence and sympathy are requisite and beneficial. A friend, formed for adversity, may detect and expose the

devices of satan; may direct in affairs of difficulty; and, by advice and exhortation, support the soul of him that is ready to faint, and thus prove that "two are better than one," Eccl. iv. 9; Rom. xv. 1; 1 Thess. v. 14.

7. To a *weight of infirmities*: which is thought to be the apostle's more particular meaning in this place. These may belong to the *body*, worn down by labor, want, disease, or age, Eccl. xii. 3—5; or to the *mind*, wanting a clear and quick apprehension, a retentive memory, steady resolution, &c. By one or other of these infirmities your weak brother is *burdened*; therefore you should *pity* rather than upbraid him; and, as making his burden your own, *help* his *infirmities* rather than *punish* them as *crimes*. In addition to this, we *conceal the infirmities* of others, when, in consequence of such concealment, we expose ourselves to the blame which would otherwise fall on them, and thus take *the inconvenience on ourselves*, we then emphatically "bear one another's burdens," 2 Cor. xi. 29. In general we should have respect to circumstances, and administer our relief in the most proper *mode, measure, time*.

Propriety recommends this duty; we are children of the same family, members of the same body, &c.—*Personal advantage* recommends it; it improves the best and happiest feelings of the heart.—*Christianity* recommends it; "So fulfil the law of Christ." Thus we are brought to consider,

II. THE ENFORCING MOTIVE. It is usual as well as proper in the apostles to enforce their advice and injunctions by a reference to the precepts and practice of Christ. Instance in liberality, 2 Cor. viii. 9; humility, Phil. ii. 4; generous sympathy, and mutual support; thus our text, "Bear," &c., "*and so fulfil the law of Christ*." We do not know of any law of Christ enjoining this duty in precisely these words, yet there is much in the teaching of our Redeemer to enforce both the principle and the practice. Hence we observe that the apostle's requirement is,

1. *Worthy of the character of Christ*, inasmuch as it is a *law of equity*. We who have so many burdens, of which a part must be borne by others, and of which we wish them to bear a part, ought to bear in return, Matt. vii. 12.—*A law of benevolence*. "Let every man seek another's wealth," Luke x. 37; 1 Cor. x. 24.—*A law of general utility*, by which society is benefited, the sum of evil being lessened, and that of happiness increased.

It is congenial with the spirit of Christ. "Let this *mind* be in you," &c. Phil. ii. 5. "He hath *loved* us." "Ye know the *grace* of our Lord Jesus Christ," &c. "Put on therefore, as the elect of God, *bowels of mercies, kindness, humbleness of mind*," &c. Col. iii. 12, 13.

3. *It is agreeable to the example of Christ*. Mark the sacrifices he made for the welfare, the salvation, of the *poor* and the *unworthy*;—condescending to become man; to labor, to suffer, and to die, John xiii. 13; Phil. ii. 6—9; Heb. ii. 14—16.

4. *It is deducible from the precepts of Christ*. "A new commandment give I unto you, that ye love one another: as I have loved you," &c. John xiii. 33, 34. Perhaps this is the very "law" to which the apostle refers. And Jesus calls it "*my commandment*," John xv. 12, 17. It comprehends and is the substance of every other, Gal. v. 14. Hence "love is the fulfilling of the law," Romans xiii. 10, and "the end of the commandment," 1 Tim. i. 5.

5. *It has and shall have the approbation of Christ*. As King and Lawgiver he has said, and in the day of judgment will say, "Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy," Matt. v. 7, and xxv. 34—40.

INFER,

1. Seeing that our text expresses the peculiar genius of the religion by which we hope for salvation, the subject should awaken inquiry, 1 John iv. 19—21.

2. If examination should happen to lead us to humiliating views of past shortcomings, &c. it should also lead to unreserved and constant obedience; which may be supported by a consideration of what we owe to *ourselves*—our *brethren*, Heb. xiii. 1, 2;—our *Saviour*, who regards what is done to his followers, as done unto himself, Matt. xxv. 40;—and to *our God*, who expects such return for his love, 1 John iv. 9—11.

 THE BEST EXERCISE.

1 Tim. iv. 7.—Exercise thyself rather unto godliness. (Sk.)

WHATSOEVER things were written aforetime, were written for our learning. The text therefore, though primarily addressed by St. Paul to Timothy, may be beneficial to us. There are exercises which belong exclusively to the ministerial character, but as godliness is designed to be a general blessing, and is the same in every clime, and through every age, the exercise recommended in the text is binding on us all. We will therefore notice,

I. THE OBJECT OF THE TEXT;—"godliness."

II. THE ATTENTION IT CLAIMS;—"Exercise thyself," &c.

III. THE MOTIVES THAT SHOULD EXCITE US TO A COMPLIANCE WITH THIS ADVICE.

I. THE OBJECT OF THE TEXT IS "GODLINESS." This is sometimes understood in a restricted sense, as having reference to one part of our duty only; hence it is mentioned in connection with other things, "Follow after righteousness, godliness, faith," &c. "Add to your faith virtue," &c., "and to patience godliness," &c., 1 Tim. vi. 11; 2 Pet. i. 6. "Godliness," in its true etymological sense, signifies *right worship*;—worship *right in its object*. Some worship the work of their hands—others "the host of heaven,"—some worship they know not what,—others worship devils. "But thou shalt worship the Lord thy God." "Worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness." *Right in its subject*.—Forms of worship are necessary: Moses bowed his head and worshipped; Joshua fell on his face, and worshipped; but "God is a Spirit, and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth." The homage of the heart is the only acceptable worship to God. *Right in its rule*.—Every thing relative to divine worship, must be regulated by the Divine precepts; the institutions of Christ, and not the inventions of men, must be the rules of our worship. The bowing to a crucifix, crossing with holy water, repeating Ave Marias, and all that ridiculous mummerly peculiar to popery, is not right worship, because it has no sanction from the Bible. But *godliness* has been generally defined as being conformity to God: moral likeness to our Maker. Absolute resemblance to God is impossible; God is an infinite being; and eternity, immensity, and infinity, are incommunicable attributes. Likeness to God may be considered in having the understanding illuminated with his light, the heart renovated by his spirit, and the life regulated by his word.

II. THE ATTENTION IT CLAIMS;—“Exercise thyself,” &c. We should exercise ourselves to gain, retain, and recommend godliness.

1. *Exercise thyself to gain godliness.* No man is naturally possessed of godliness; we are totally unlike God. Godliness is not to be gained by a few cold wishes, or languid desires. “*Exercise thyself;*” this is a word of great importance, it is borrowed from the practice of those who contended for the Olympic garland; who cast away every impediment, and strained every nerve to win the prize. There is much in godliness that demands the exercise of the human understanding, for “great is the mystery of godliness.” Exercise yourselves to know all you can of godliness; its doctrines, its principles, and its practices. In order to this, give attention to reading—to hearing—to meditation—to prayer. Not only to gain the knowledge, but the enjoyment of godliness. It is a blessing to have a right judgment in all things, but knowledge of itself will not do; we must enjoy God, and dwell in God, and have God dwelling in us.

2. *Exercise thyself to retain godliness.* Some, after having sought it with many tears and much earnestness, seem unconcerned about retaining it. To hold it fast, *set a high value upon it.* To prize it too highly is impossible; there is no overrating it. *Seek for an increase of it.* The most advanced christian may yet advance; godliness possesses infinite attractions, and prospects interminable; and he who is not advancing is declining. *Stand aloof from the society of those who would rob you of your treasure.* If you possessed a large sum of money, or a rich collection of gems, pearls, and diamonds, you would not like to travel a road infested with robbers; and if you were obliged to, you would take heed to secure a guard, and get yourself well armed. Apply this to our subject, and exercise yourself unto godliness, to keep it in possession.

3. *Exercise thyself to recommend godliness.* Many are totally destitute of this invaluable treasure. They are ignorant of its vast advantages; and they are in extreme danger without it. Remember it is an important part of godliness, to love your neighbors as yourselves, and as you have been prompted under the influence of self-love, to seek this godliness for your own benefit; you are bound to recommend it to others. Do it by your conversation. Talk of it to your children, to your families, and to your neighbors. Do it by your holy lives. Exemplify in your conduct the purity of its principles. Let others see your good works, &c.—This exercise should be *spiritual*; all the powers of the immortal spirit should be engaged in it.—*Pre-eminent*; it should be our first and most important business.—*Habitual*; we should be always at it.—And, *Persevering*; we must be “faithful unto death.”

III. THE MOTIVES THAT SHOULD EXCITE US TO A COMPLIANCE WITH THIS ADVICE.

1. *Because this is the best exercise.* God is the best being; the participation of godliness, makes us resemble God; and every other exercise of which man is capable, is frivolous when held in competition with this. It is the best exercise; as it engages the best powers of man, and these powers are directed to the noblest object.

2. *It is the most honorable exercise.* Some think the exercise of godliness mean, and despicable; but who are they that draw this conclusion? Are they persons who have studied its character? No, they are men who hate godliness, because godliness condemns them. Is there no honor in treading in the footsteps of the most illustrious characters who have ever lived,—patriarchs, prophets, evangelists, apostles, and martyrs, “of whom the world was not worthy?” Is there no honor in that exercise which will

most effectually secure to us the possession of the divine nature? Which will "make us kings and priests unto God;" sons and daughters of the Lord Almighty?

3. *It is the most satisfactory exercise.* Bodily exercise is often irksome and laborious; and produces a weariness of the flesh; but the work of righteousness is peace, and the exercise of godliness yields secret satisfaction. What a comfort to have a conscience void of offence towards God and man! To know that we are working out our salvation! That we are walking in the narrow way that leadeth unto life; and returning to Zion with singing, and everlasting joy upon our heads.

4. *It is the most rational exercise.* There are many irrational exercises in the world, exercises that injure the constitution, ruin the health, and destroy the soul; but as godliness is profitable unto all things, that exercise must be most rational, which tends to secure this invaluable treasure.

5. *It is the most successful exercise.* How often are our exercises in this world unsuccessful; our labors frustrated; and our expectations blasted! but the exercise used in reference to godliness will be successful. They that ask shall receive, and they that seek shall find. We have the promises of an immutable Being to ensure success.

In conclusion we observe, there are in our congregations,

1. Some who have never begun the exercise recommended in the text. To such we say, You are capable, under the influence of Divine grace, of exercising yourselves unto godliness; you have means afforded you: you are very guilty in neglecting your salvation so long; if you procrastinate much more, your ruin will be inevitable; the longer you delay, the more difficult the work will be, and the less time you will have to accomplish it. Oh seize the present moment, and now begin this long neglected, but deeply important exercise.

2. Some who have begun, but have relaxed in the exercise; who have put their hand to the plough, but have looked back. Oh stir up the gift of God that is within you! Pray for the quickening influences of the Holy Ghost; and "give all diligence to make your calling and election sure."

3. Some who have begun, and continued to exercise themselves unto godliness. "Hold fast the beginning of your confidence steadfast unto the end, for in due season ye shall reap if ye faint not."

THE FIGHT OF FAITH

1 Timothy vi. 12.—Fight the good fight of faith. (Sk.)

THE apostle, in the chapter before us, after enjoining certain duties, and giving a caution against anti-christian teachers, proceeds to show the value of godliness with contentment; and he does this by contrasting it with the love of money, which is the root of all evil; "which, while some have coveted after, they have erred from the faith," ver. 8, 9, 10. Covetousness being criminal and disgraceful in all, but especially in the ministers of religion; the apostle advised Timothy, as a man of God, to flee from it, and from all the vices which it occasions; and to pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, patience, and meekness, ver. 11. He then adds "Fight the good

fight of faith," or, as some read it, "agonize the good agony"—"Combat the good combat of faith;" which terms are quite agonistical, and refer to the eagerness with which those who entered in the Grecian games, struggled for, and laid hold on the prize. In impressing this subject, we may notice,

I. THE CHRISTIAN'S WARFARE,

II. ITS PECULIAR CHARACTER.

I. THE CHRISTIAN'S WARFARE.—It is *Defensive* and *Offensive*.

1. *Defensive*. He has to contend with, 1, *A depraved nature*. "The carnal mind is enmity against God," Rom. viii. 7. "The flesh lusteth against the spirit," Gal. v. 17. Pride, anger, envy, jealousy, hatred, malice, revenge, and all other dispositions contrary to the mind of Christ, must be opposed and overcome, Rom. xii. 21; Rev. iii. 12; xxi. 17. 2. *The temptations of satan*. These are various; hence he is styled "the accuser of the brethren," Rev. x. 12; "a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour," 1 Peter v. 8; the "prince," and "the god of this world," "the prince of the power of the air," &c. John xii. 31; 2 Cor. iv. 4; Eph. ii. 2. These armies he commands, and varies his mode of operation, according to circumstances: hence he presented a Babylonish garment, &c. to Achan, Jos. vii. 21;—Bath-sheba to David, 2 Sam. xi. 2—4;—and thirty pieces of silver to Judas, Matt. xvi. 15. But whatever are his temptations, we are commanded to resist, steadfast in the faith, 1 Pet. v. 8; Jam. iv. 7.

3. *The allurements of the world*. Its spirit, maxims, and fashion, Rom. xii. 2; 1 Pet. iv. 2, 3. This warfare is also,

2. *Offensive*. Hence the christian has to attack satan's strong holds, 2 Cor. x. 4. These are, 1. *Ignorance*. Numbers are so deluded, as to imagine that ignorance will excuse them for neglecting religion; but this is their condemnation, they are ignorant, not of necessity but choice, John iii. 19. Others say, "Ignorance is the mother of devotion;" and use their utmost efforts to prevent the human family from being benefited by that book which was designed to be "a lamp unto our feet, and a light unto our path," Psa. cxix. 105. The duty of christians, is to combine their efforts to remove or prevent this evil. The means are—the circulation of the sacred scriptures—a living ministry—the instruction of youth—the distribution of tracts, &c.—2. *Prejudice*. Nothing more effectually fortifies the mind against truth than this; and to overcome it, you must exercise prudence, meekness, patience, and love. With these graces, connect scriptural and sound argumentation, associated with correctness of principle, and conduct.—3. *Pride*. To some religion is degrading—it will stain their honor—rob them of their reputation; and thus Christ is to some a stumbling block, and unto others foolishness, 1 Cor. i. 23; the pride of human reason will not suffer them to receive the doctrines of the cross. These you must combat with the hallowed weapons of truth, which will admit of no system of religion but that which God has revealed, 1 Cor. iii. 14.—4. *Love of the world*, ver. 10. To overcome this, you must show the importance of spiritual things compared with temporal things &c. Take care, however, to connect with your utmost exertions, unceasing and ardent prayer to God, for the convincing influence of the Holy Ghost, without whose aid nothing is wise, or strong, or good. Let us therefore notice,

II. ITS PECULIAR CHARACTER. It is designated,

First, "*A fight of faith*." It is a fight of faith as opposed,

1. *To physical exertion*. You are not to rally your forces, and combine your energies, to oppose an earthly power, or destroy the bodies of the

children of men; but rather to promote your own salvation, and that of others. It imports a mind determinately opposed to sin and satan, pursuing holiness and heaven, Eph. vi. 12.

2. *Mental speculation.* It is possible for a man to be well acquainted with the theory of christianity—to be a giant in literature—an able abettor of the truth—a wise disputant on theological subjects—a successful antagonist in the controversial field, and, after all, a stranger to inward religion. This was not the case with our apostle: he was not a mere theorist, 1 Cor. ix. 26, 27; Phil. iii. 14. This fight of faith imports a mind reconciled to God, Col. i. 21, 22;—a union with Christ by faith, Gal. ii. 20;—and the exercise of every grace, Eph. vi. 13—18.

3. *Doubtful uncertainty.* In an earthly campaign, a successful issue is uncertain. Troops may be well disciplined, under a judicious commander, and every thing ominous of success; but circumstances over which neither the commander nor his troops have any control, may determine the conflict, and place the victorious expectant in the hands of his enemies. But in this fight nothing can endanger those who are *immutably faithful*; “he that shall endure unto the end, the same shall be saved,” Matt. xxiv. 13; Rev. ii. 10.

Secondly, “*A good fight of faith.*” This will appear when we consider,

1. *The authority by which it is sanctioned.*—“All scripture is given by inspiration of God,” 2 Tim. iii. 16. This text therefore, considered in connection with other texts of equal import, proves that it is sanctioned by the highest authority, 1 Tim. i. 18, 19; Rev. iii. 11, 12, ii. 7.

2. *The aid afforded during the period of exercise.* In military operations, a sanguinary engagement protracted in its duration, induces debility, and exhaustion; and will not admit of those supplies necessary for recruiting strength and invigorating the spirit; but in this warfare the supplies are seasonable, and sufficient, Prov. iii. 6; Isa. xli. 10; 2 Cor. xii. 9.

3. *The security given.* In prosecuting this warfare, according to the rules laid down in the holy scriptures, you may say with an apostle, “Who shall separate us from the love of Christ?” &c. Rom. viii. 35—39. “No weapon that is formed against you shall prosper,” Isa. liv. 17. “When the enemy shall come in like a flood, the Spirit of the Lord shall lift up a standard against him,” Isa. lix. 19.

4. *The final triumph.* Instance the case of the apostle, “I have fought a good fight,” &c. 2 Tim. iv. 7, 8, “Death shall be swallowed up in victory,” 1 Cor. xv. 54—57. The conqueror shall be enthroned, Rev. iii. 21.

INFERENCES.

1. *This warfare will neither admit of substitution, nor cessation of arms.* The command is *personal* in its application, and *perpetual* in its obligation.

2. *This is the greatest encouragement.* Christ is your commander—the Holy Spirit your helper—the scriptures your directory—angels your guardians—saints your companions; and heaven the inheritance reserved for you, 1 Pet. i. 3—5.

3. *A refusal to fight is open rebellion against God.* Consider this ye sinners, and while the treaty of reconciliation is open, 2 Co.. v. 20, humble yourselves before God, and implore mercy.

REMEMBRANCE OF THE POOR RECOMMENDED.

Galatians ii. 10.—We should remember the poor. (Sk.)

THE leading topics of the christian ministry are frequently inculcated, and by judicious hearers, generally understood, and distinctly remembered. The fall of man, the redemption of the world, the necessity of regeneration, and the final rewards of virtue and vice, are subjects, which in a direct or indirect manner, breathe in every sermon you hear, in every prayer you offer, and in every hymn you sing. But there are other subjects of a subordinate character, clearly stated in the sacred volume, which though they may not form articles of your faith, yet stand as rules for your practice, and are too important to be discarded from the pulpit. Among those we may notice the reciprocal duties that arise from the various relations in which we stand to society; and one of the least regarded, though not the least in importance, is the practice recommended in the text, "We should remember the poor." We will,

I. EXAMINE THE NATURE OF THE ASSERTION.

II. STATE THE OBLIGATIONS WE ARE UNDER TO COMPLY WITH IT.

III. ANSWER OBJECTIONS.

I. EXAMINE THE NATURE OF THE ASSERTION. We need not spend a moment in describing the poor: alas! they describe themselves. You daily witness the scantiness and poverty of their apparel, their pale and emaciated forms; and you hear their piteous plaints, and the tale of their complicated woes. But we should,

1. *Remember the work of the poor.* On these the curse entailed by sin, daily rests; in the sweat of their face they eat bread, till they return unto the ground. *Their work is irksome and laborious.* See their hands, worn hard with incessant toil; their faces bathed in profuse sweat; and their bodies bent, not so much with the weight of years, as with the pressure of ponderous burdens. *Their work is often destructive to health.* Many are plunged in mines; view the confined situation in which they labor, the unnatural posture in which they pursue their work, the noxious damps that infect the air in which they breathe, and the incessant streams that distil upon their wearisome bodies. Huge masses of rocks often burst around them, and bury them alive in their subterraneous vaults; and even if they escape these awful accidents, what multitudes go prematurely to the grave. *But their work is chiefly beneficial.* They labor for the public benefit. Consider the labors of the mechanic, the husbandman, and the artizan.

2. *Remember the deprivations of the poor.* Here note, the means of instruction which are placed beyond their reach. The children of the poor are sent to work, as soon as they can earn a scanty pittance, with little or no learning, except what they get from Sunday schools. They read but little, partly for want of books, and partly for want of inclination. They are deprived in many instances of the common necessities of life; view the miserable huts and hovels in which they reside; in low damp situations where the wintry winds howl through the broken casement: view their tattered vestments amid the rigors of winter, and their coarse food scantily administered, and scarcely sufficient to satisfy the demands of exhausted nature.

3. *Our remembrance of the poor should be founded on a personal acquaintance with their circumstances.* We should visit their abodes, and find out the retreats of wretchedness. It should be attended with a compassionate feeling towards them. "Indeed Sir," said a person of large prop-

erty, "I am a very compassionate man; but to tell you the truth, I do not know any person in want." The fact was he stood aloof from the poor, and kept out of their way.—And it should be accompanied by relief. Many say "Depart in peace, be ye warmed, and be ye filled;" but never administer the blessings which the poor need. We cannot do all we would, but let us do what we can. Cannot we retrench a little from our food? Or give them some garments? Or employ them in our farms, or at our merchandise?

II. STATE THE OBLIGATIONS WE ARE UNDER TO COMPLY WITH IT.

1. *The dictates of humanity require it.* There is a chord in human hearts, that vibrates to the touch of misery; hence all human beings occasionally remember mercy. The sufferings even of brutes excite compassion. The Jews had a law which required them to help an ox or an ass in distress, Deut. xxii. 4. And shall we show mercy to a brute, and neglect a man? The poor are our brethren, one God hath created us, one Saviour hath redeemed us, one heaven will receive us, if faithful unto death.

2. *The demands of duty require it.* The laws of God have made this imperative upon us. The texts that bear upon this point are numerous Deut. xv. 7—9; Dan. iv. 27; Luke vi. 36—38; Matt. vii. 12; 1 John iii. 17. Consider the connection of the text. The saints at Jerusalem were exceedingly oppressed by poverty. A contribution had been made for them in Macedonia, and in Achaia; St. Paul had written to the Romans concerning them; Peter, James, and John, wished to "remember the poor;" "the same, (said Paul) I also was forward to do."

3. *The rights of justice require it.* The common opinion is, that "the poor are solely dependent on the rich for a scanty pittance; and that men of affluence are independent; have independent fortunes," &c. But the reverse of this is the truth. Men who do nothing, are mere drones in the hive of society, who live upon the labors of others. To the poor we are most deeply indebted. Who erect our houses? Who form our clothes? Who procure our food? Do not the poor? therefore remember them. Justice requires this at your hands.

4. *The claims of interest require it.* Every man is obligated to pursue that course of conduct, which will most effectually subserve his present and final happiness. Is it not our interest to imitate God? God remembers the poor: his Son was poor; his disciples were poor; to the poor the gospel was preached; God hath chosen the poor. Angels are mindful of the poor; they visited poor shepherds—they conducted the soul of poor Lazarus to paradise. God will bless those who remember the poor, Psalm xli. 1, 2; Prov. iii. 9, xix. 17; Isa. lviii. 10, 11.

III. ANSWER OBJECTIONS.

1. "*My circumstances are impoverished, and I have nothing to spare.*" What nothing?—Think of the poor widow, and her mites. Read the account of her to whom Elijah applied for a morsel of bread, 1 Kings xvii. 11, 12.

2. "*Charity must begin at home.*" But remember it should not end at home. The proper sphere of charity is abroad; the ties of relationship bind us to look at home; but benevolence looks abroad on all the suffering sons of humanity, and stretches forth her hands to relieve them.

3. "*I have a right to do what I will with my own.*" But what is your own? Are you not a steward? Is not God the universal proprietor of all things? Will he not call you to an account how you have spent his goods? It is not optional with you to give or not to give; God has made it imperative on you.

4 "*The poor do not deserve to be remembered.*" But their merit is not the ground or rule of our benevolence. We are to "be merciful, as our Father in heaven is merciful;" and what if God had dealt with us according to our merit? How do we know, that the poor do not deserve what we give them? We do not know their value or their real characters.

Conclude with a *word of advice* to the poor; to excite them to economy, to submission to their superiors, and gratitude to their benefactors.—And a *word of comfort* to induce them to bear their lot of poverty, during the period of their mortal pilgrimage, with patience and resignation to God.

LIBERALITY TO THE POOR.

Luke iii. 10, 11.—And the people asked him, saying, What shall we do then? He answereth and saith unto them, He that hath two coats, let him impart to him that hath none; and he that hath meat, let him do likewise. (H. H.)

In order to understand the true meaning of any part of scripture, the strictest attention must be paid to the context. If this rule be not observed, there is scarcely any thing which may not be sanctioned by the inspired volume; and the most contradictory positions may appear to stand on equal authority. Suppose, for instance, the question in our text be taken, as other apparently similar questions must be taken, namely, as an inquiry into the way of salvation; we shall make John the Baptist return an answer directly contrary to the whole tenor of the Gospel. When the gaoler asked Paul and Silas, "What he must do to be saved?" they answered, "Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved." Acts xvi. 30, 31. *This is the only true answer that can be given to that question;* for "there is no other name under heaven given among men whereby we can be saved," but the name of Jesus Christ. Acts. iv. 12. But if we look into the context, we find that John the Baptist had been "preaching the baptism of repentance for the remission of sins," ver. 3; or, in other words had been preaching salvation by Jesus Christ, exactly as the apostle Peter, and indeed all the Apostles, did on the day of Pentecost.* Then, seeing multitudes coming to him for baptism, and apprehending that the great majority of them were taking up a profession of religion upon very light and erroneous grounds, he cautioned them strongly against a presumptuous confidence on the one hand, or an unproductive and hypocritical profession on the other; and exhorted them, if they would not experience the fate of a barren tree, to "bring forth fruits worthy of repentance," ver. 7—9. In reply to this, the people ask, "What shall we do?" That is, *What fruits shall we bring forth,* in order to evince our sincerity † And the direction which John gives them, is an answer exactly suited to the occasion: it is to this effect; "If you would approve yourselves sincere and upright in your profession of faith in the Promised Messiah, shew forth your faith by your works, and, above all, by an abounding exercise of love."

Having thus prepared our way by a view of the context, and having as-

* See the people's inquiry, and Peter's answer, Acts ii. 37, 38.

† See the Greek, ver. 8—10. This will remove all doubt: for they adopt the very same term as John had used.

certained what the Baptist's design was in giving the people the direction in our text, we shall proceed to the more distinct consideration of his answer, and shall open to you,

I. ITS IMPORT—

It is manifest that the direction given by him is figurative, and therefore not to be taken in its strict and literal sense. But we must not therefore imagine, that we are at liberty to disregard it, as though it had no force at all. There can be no doubt but that the Baptist intended to inculcate a very tender compassion towards our indigent fellow-creatures, and a very enlarged exercise of liberality for their relief. To obtain, with as much precision as the subject is capable of, the true import of his words, we shall adduce from other parts of scripture, but especially from the writings of the same Evangelist.

1. Some other passages of similar tendency—

First, we shall notice one or two that are also figurative, Luke xii. 33, 34. & xiv. 12—14.— —T here can be no doubt but that these require a very high degree of liberality to the poor, since they were actually practiced in *their strictest sense* by the first christians, Acts ii. 44, 45, & iv. 32—37.— —From these we may turn to others that are more plain, Luke vi. 38. & xi. 41.— —What an accumulation of words is there in the former of these passages to encourage our compliance with the precept; and what a gracious benediction in the latter!— —To *the rich* there is an especial charge given to be bountiful, 1 Tim. vi. 18, 19; but it is not to them only that this duty belongs; but to those also who gain a daily subsistence by their manual labor, Eph. iv. 28. To all, according to their ability, it equally appertains; for, on the foresight of a dearth in Judea, all the disciples of Antioch, every one according to his ability, contributed instantly to their relief, Acts xi. 28—30.

2. Some examples which are set forth for our imitation—

That of Zaccheus is particularly to our purpose, because he was just converted to the faith of Christ, and because our blessed Lord himself acknowledged this heavenly disposition to be an evidence of his having actually obtained acceptance with his God, Luke xix. 8, 9.— —But the example of the Macedonian churches is yet more pertinent; because it is an example, not of an individual, but of whole churches; and those, not in a state of ease and opulence, but of great affliction and deep poverty; and because it is expressly set forth for the imitation of others, who are called up to imitate it, *in order to prove the sincerity of their love to Christ*, 2 Cor. viii. 1—4, 8, 9. By carefully comparing these several passages, we see clearly what our duty is: we are not required to burthen ourselves in order to ease others, but so to participate their burthens that they may partake of our ease, ib. ver. 13, 14: thus to “bear one another's burthen is eminently to fulfil the law of Christ, Gal. vi. 2.

Having thus marked the import of the injunction in our text, we proceed to shew,

II. ITS REASONABLENESS—

The whole of God's “law is good,” and the service it requires is reasonable. But the duty enjoined in our text, though arduous to a selfish mind, is particularly reasonable. For consider,

1. What obligations we owe to God for the superior comforts which we enjoy—

It is God who assigns to all their lot, not only in respect to the situation in which they are born, Acts xvii. 26, 28, but in all the changes, whether

prosperous or adverse, which they experience through life, 1 Sam. ii. 6, 7. Whatever therefore we have above others, "it is God alone who has made us to differ," 1 Cor. iv. 7. And how eminently is this the case with respect to the ravages of war which during these last twenty years have desolated almost the whole of Europe, but have never reached our happy land! Compare our state with that of a great part of Germany at this present moment,* and then say, whether a compassionate regard for our suffering fellow-creatures be not called for at our hands, and whether such an expression of it as our text requires, be at all unreasonable? Methinks, it is not possible to have even the most indistinct view of our obligations to God, without saying from our hearts, "What shall I render unto the Lord for all the benefits that he hath done unto me?"

2. What we ourselves should desire, if we were reduced to the state in which myriads of our fellow-creatures now are—

It is not easy to place ourselves in the situation of persons of whom we hear only by report; but yet we may conceive what we ourselves should desire, and what we should think reasonable, if we were perishing with cold and nakedness and hunger, whilst others, embarked in the same cause with ourselves, were exempt from those sufferings, and were enjoying comparative ease and affluence: Should we not wish them to stand forth for our relief? Should we not think it reasonable, that their exertions should rise in proportion to our necessities, and that they should almost literally fulfil the precept in our text, the man who had two coats imparting to us who had none, and that he who had meat should do likewise? Let us adopt for our principle the golden rule, and "Do unto others, as we would they should do unto us."

What our blessed Lord and Saviour has done for us—

This is the consideration which St. Paul himself suggests in reference to this very point, 2 Cor. viii. 9. O consider, "how rich he was" in the possession of his Father's glory; and how "poor he became," "not having so much as a place where to lay his head," but dying under the curse that was due to our sins. Consider too what his object was; namely, that we, who deserved to be in hell without a drop of water to cool our tongues, might through his poverty be rich, and possess all the glory of heaven. Does such love as this require no return? When this very Saviour tells us, that what we do unto the least of his brethren, he accepts as done to himself, shall we think any requisition hard, or any sacrifice too great? Truly, not only our property, but even our life itself, may well be sacrificed for him, 1 John iii. 16; and we should account ourselves happy in proportion as we have an opportunity to advance his glory in the world.

But instead of dwelling any longer on the general reasonableness of this precept, we will proceed to notice,

III. ITS SUITABLENESS TO THE PRESENT OCCASION—

Rarely, if ever, has greater occasion for charitable exertions existed than at present.† — Now therefore we might justly call upon you to comply with our text almost in the literal sense. But, waving that, we must urge you to adopt the *principle* that is there inculcated— —and to bear in mind, that "he who soweth sparingly, shall reap also sparingly, and he who soweth bountifully shall reap also bountifully. Let every man do ac-

*This Sermon was preached in 1814, on occasion of a collection for the relief of the most grievous distresses in Germany.

†Here the particular occasion should be opened at considerable length.

cording as he is disposed in his heart, not grudgingly or of necessity ; for God loveth a cheerful giver," 2 Cor. ix. 6, 7. Do not however forget the important distinctions with which we began the subject. It is to glorify Christ, and to shew the sincerity of your love to him, that we invite you ;—not to purchase heaven by your alms. Bear that in mind ; and God will not forget it in the day of judgment.

A CALL TO WATCHFULNESS AND SOBRIETY.

1 Thess. v. 6.—Therefore let us not sleep as do others, but let us watch and be sober. (Sk.)

EVERY thing in this world is liable to degenerate. The richest soil would, if neglected, be soon overrun with weeds. The most laudable institutions, if not watched over, would be desecrated from their original purpose. The finest and best constructed buildings, are subject to decay. Metals of the finest polish are liable to be tarnished, and Christians of the most exalted piety, may fall from their own steadfastness, and degenerate into lukewarmness and apostacy. On this principle, we justify all the cautions, warnings, and admonitory precepts found in the apostolic writings. In the last of these, we include the text ; " Let us not sleep," &c. We have here,

I. A STATE ADVERTED TO ;—" Sleep, as do others."

II. A COURSE OF CONDUCT DESCRIBED ; " Watch, and be sober."

III. AN OBLIGATION TO PURSUE IT INTIMATED :—" Let us not sleep—but let us watch," &c.

I. A STATE ADVERTED TO ;—" Sleep." This is the state of sinners : their moral condition is variously described, as being a state of darkness—bondage—death, &c. Here, they are considered as being asleep, &c.

1. *Those who are asleep, are insensible of their state, and unconscious of all the objects that surround them.* They have eyes, but they perceive no objects ; ears, but they hear no sound ; hearts, but they feel no sensations. How descriptive is this of the state of sinners ! To their worldly concerns, they are broad awake ; all eye, all ear, all attention ; but in reference to the interests of their souls, a deep sleep has fallen upon them. They are unconscious of the immediate presence of God with them—insensible of his amazing love—of their moral condition as sinners—of the duties that devolve upon them—of the dangers that await them—and the privileges they are called to realize.

2. *Those who are asleep, are motionless and inactive.* Powers the most vigorous may be in their possession ; blessings the most inestimable may be within their grasp, and business the most important may devolve upon them ; yet no efforts are called forth, no energies are roused—such is the state of sinners. For the accomplishment of worldly objects they are ever on the alert, but in reference to their spiritual interests, they are motionless and inactive ; a death-like torpor rests upon them : they hear of heaven, but make no efforts to enter in at the strait gate, and walk in the narrow way that leadeth to life ;—they hear of hell, but they give no diligence to escape its tremendous punishment ;—they are told of their duty, but to do it they manifest no concern.

3. *Those who are asleep, are often the subjects of illusion and deception* What senseless dreams delude them ! How many airy nothings swim before their eyes ! How many pleasing and painful thoughts occupy their minds as destitute of reason, as they are of reality ! Nothing can be more characteristic of the condition of sinners. Their whole life is a dream. Delusions deep as hell bind them fast ; and all their ideas of God, of themselves, of sin, and religion, misery, and happiness, are the phantoms of error, and the creatures of imagination.

4. *Those who are asleep, are frequently exposed to dangers which they have no power to escape.* Hence sleep is a defenceless state. Men may bolt their doors, yet thieves often enter and surprise them. But sinners are exposed to dangers infinitely more dreadful. They are taken already in the snare of the devil, and they are liable every moment to be arrested, and hurried down to perdition. Such is the state adverted to in the text. Let us notice,

II. THE COURSE OF CONDUCT EXPRESSED ;—“ Let us watch and be sober.”

1. *Watchfulness is opposed to sleep, therefore let us be wakeful.* Complying with the requisition of the apostle, “ Awake thou that sleepest,” &c. Rousing ourselves from that delusive slumber into which sin has thrown us. Let us awake, and keep awake.

2. *Watchfulness is opposed to thoughtlessness and stupidity, therefore let us be considerate and thoughtful.* Our worldly business claims our thoughts ; but our souls, our God, our salvation, our duties, and privileges, possess higher claims. To these we should bend our thoughts, with deep concern and solicitude.

3. *Watchfulness is opposed to indolence and sloth, therefore we should be diligent.* “ Slothfulness casteth into a deep sleep.” We have much to do for our neighbors, ourselves, and our God, and we must work while it is day.

4. *Watchfulness has reference to danger, therefore we must be prepared to meet its attacks.* Our enemies are wakeful and vigilant, and always waiting to attack us to advantage. Let us always be on our guard, and watch as sentinels at the post of duty.

5. *To watchfulness we must add sobriety.* Be sober, that is temperate ; avoid gluttony and intoxication : eating and drinking are designed to nourish the body ; but we may make our table a snare, and convert our aliments into poisons. Be sober, that is calm and dispassionate : holding your tempers and passions in subjection, never suffering wrathful dispositions to surprise you.

III. AN OBLIGATION TO PURSUE IT INTIMATED ;—“ Let us not sleep, but let us watch,” &c We must regard this as an apostolic precept ; an expression of this kind, in some cases, amounts to little more than advice or counsel ; but when a superior gives it to a dependent, and especially when God by the ministry of his servants, imparts it for our instruction, it is a law from which we dare not swerve.

1. *Our circumstances call us to comply with this requisition.* We need not sleep, but we may watch ; the power and the obligation go together, we are not circumstanced as heathens are, nor as Jews, or Papists, or Mohammedans are. Our privileges are superior, therefore we should not sleep as do others.

2. *Our profession demands obedience to it.* Hear the apostle : “ Ye are all the children of light, and the children of the day,” &c., ver. 5. “ For they that sleep, sleep in the night,” &c., ver. 7. We profess the christian

religion; this prohibits sin, therefore we should not sleep as others; this prescribes duties, therefore we should watch and be sober.

3. *Our personal security should bind us to observe it.* Sinners are in a state of dreadful danger; their imaginary peace is no security against its attacks, ver. 3. Safety and duty are inseparable, "Watch and be sober," this will insure protection.

4. *Our eternal happiness is connected with the performance of this duty.*—"Blessed are those servants whom the Lord when he cometh shall find watching."

Here then we discern,

1. The essential difference between the righteous and the wicked; the latter are asleep in their sins, the former are watching, &c.

2. That the christian religion binds us to the practice of a holy singularity; we must not do as others, but do what God has enjoined.

A CHARGE TO THE RICH.

1 Timothy vi. 17—19.—Charge them that are rich in this world, that they be not high-minded, nor trust in uncertain riches, but in the living God, who giveth us richly all things to enjoy; that they do good, that they be rich in good works, ready to distribute, willing to communicate: laying up in store for themselves a good foundation against the time to come, that they may lay hold on eternal life." (Sk.)

THE holy scriptures contain advices and instructions suited to every sort and condition of men. And God's ministers are charged with messages to all;—some of these messages are mild and agreeable,—and others are the very reverse: so that in some cases, great and excellent messengers have shrunk from their duty, see Jer. xx. 7—18;—Jonah i. 3;—but they dare not refuse, Ezek. ii. 5—8, iii. 17; Jer. i. 8, 17. Allow me then to deliver the message contained in the text; by attending to the *subjects*, the *nature*, and the *execution* of the charge.

I. THE SUBJECTS OF THIS CHARGE;—"the rich." Whatever difficulty may be found in the appropriation of the term *rich* to individuals; it is sufficiently obvious, that there are rich as well as poor. Riches are opposed to poverty;—and as poverty signifies scantiness, penury, want;—so riches imply abundance, a store, more than enough.

1 *There may be a thousand gradations of riches*: from the least superabundance, to the largest sum that a mortal ever possessed. But that man must be ranked among the rich, who can command the necessaries, conveniencies, and comforts of life, and still have something to spare.

2. *Riches are strongly desired by mankind.* And the rich are frequently envied by their inferiors. And if man might be viewed merely as an inhabitant of this world, such conduct would hardly be censurable. But the word of God, which connects eternity with time, and man with eternity, shows that religion is a thing essential to the happiness of the present and of the future state. Speaking of riches and poverty, in a way suited to these momentous associations, declares advantages peculiar to the poor, and dangers peculiar to the rich. Some of the latter, with the way to avoid them, form,

II. THE NATURE OF THIS CHARGE. Which comprehends,

The dangers specified.

1. *Highmindedness.* It is exceedingly difficult for a person to be rich and not to think the more highly of himself on *that* account. Solomon asserts, that the rich man is "wise in his own conceit," Prov. xxviii. 11; and Ezekiel, "that the heart is lifted up because of riches," chap. xxviii. 5. The manner in which such are honored, and the advantages which their riches give them, lead to ideas of superiority, and thus tend to generate and to nourish this ostentatious evil.

2. "*Trust in uncertain riches.*" Trust in riches, is mentioned in the scriptures as a very dangerous sin, see Mark x. 24; Prov. xi. 4, 28, xxiii. 5. And the rich are much exposed to *this* danger;—because riches may procure many worldly comforts;—they may banish many apparent evils. And to trust in any thing rather than in God, is the common fault of man. Let us now endeavor to understand from the apostle,

The way to avoid these dangers.

1. *Trust in the living God.* Hold your possessions as *uncertain*, but depend on God, who cannot fail. He gives even the riches: he gives all things;—the enjoyment, the zest. He alone can enable us really to enjoy what we have. How few enjoy even riches! "*Trust in the living God*;" because, if riches fail, he can in the absence of riches, give sweet enjoyment. *Trust in God!* This is of more value than any quantity of riches; implicit dependence on God is greater security against want, than any extent of worldly property.

2. *Employ your riches in doing good.*—*Liberally*;—"rich in good works." Be in good works what you are in worldly possessions, abounding.—*Promptly*;—"ready to distribute." Some people who are very *able*, are never *ready*.—*Extensively*;—"ready to distribute." We often hear of, what we may be allowed to call, home-charity; but the apostle here enforces distributive charity. So the Psalmist, "He hath dispersed, he hath given to the poor," &c. Ps. cxii. 9.—*Freely*;—"willing to communicate." How hardly are some persuaded to give, even a little!

Observe the different words which the apostle uses:—*Distributing*, appears to signify *general charity*. Give extensively; not to one or two persons or things, but to every laudable institution to which your means will extend.—*Communicate*; be *socially benevolent*. Be willing to share your good things with your fellow creatures. Be *hospitably* benevolent, see 2 Cor. ix. 5; Rom. xii. 13; 1 Tim. iii. 2; Tit. i. 8; 1 Pet. iv. 9.

3. *Live for eternity*;—"Laying up in store for themselves a good foundation against the time to come." *Laying up*, is a phrase which surely the rich understand. *Laying up for themselves*.—For whom are you *laying up*? see Ps. xxxix. 6; Matt. xxv. 40; Heb. vi. 20; 2 Cor. ix. 6—"That they may lay hold on eternal life." *Riches* will not secure life. They permit their owners to perish; but a proper use of riches will end in everlasting life, see Luke xvi. 9. The apostle adapts his language and his ideas remarkably to the rich. They may still be *rich*,—they may *lay up*,—they may still *trust in*,—and still aim at *high* things. Oh that the rich were wise, that they understood these things! Oh that their *riches*, their *trust*, their *laying up*, their *high views*, were all consecrated to God, But whether they will hear, or forbear to hear; *we* must not shrink from,

III. THE EXECUTION OF THIS CHARGE. It is easy to charge the *poor*; but when the rich are the subjects, who will dare to say plain things to them? Their property, their dignity, their very appearance forbid. But the command is. "*Charge the rich.*" Allow us then, oh ye rich! not as

"lords over God's heritage," but as messengers of the Most High, to charge you.

Recollect,—that though your riches give you great worldly advantages, they also expose you to very serious dangers; "How hardly shall they that have riches enter into the kingdom of God!" Unsanctified riches always prove a curse to their owners. Would you enjoy any of their real advantages? then, "Honor the Lord with your substance, and with the first-fruits of all your increase, Prov. iii. 9.

Beware of high-mindedness; and remember, that though some rich men are wise and good; yet riches *may* be associated with any thing, and almost every thing, that is mean, and low, and vile.

Recollect, too, that there is but one way of salvation, for the rich and the poor. Repentance towards God, and faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, are essential to your salvation.

Finally, remember that a great day of reckoning and of judgment will come, when God will judge every man according to his works.

THE CHRISTIAN'S DUTY AND HOPE.

1 Peter i. 13.—Wherefore gird up the loins of your mind, be sober, and hope to the end, for the grace that is to be brought unto you at the revelation of Jesus Christ. (Sk.)

ONE of the evidences of the truth and divinity of the christian religion is, that it obtained establishment in the world, not only without any assistance from human governments, or from the corrupt principles of human nature, but in opposition to both the one and the other. Nature loves sensual indulgence; christianity requires self-denial. Nature shrinks from pain and persecution. But the early christians had, in consequence of their profession, to endure fiery trials, ch. iv. 12. Hence the encouragements and supports afforded them in the former part of the chapter; and hence the exhortation to "a patient continuance in well doing," contained in our text itself; which points attention to the christian's duty, and his expectation.

I. THE CHRISTIAN'S DUTY;—"Gird up the loins of your mind, be sober, and hope to the end."

1. "*Gird up*," &c. Here is an allusion to the manner in which persons in eastern countries usually disposed of their long flowing garments, when circumstances would not admit of their wearing them at full length. This was the case; that is, they confined what was loose and inconvenient by means of the girdle about the loins.

(1.) *In their journeying.* So Exod. xii. 11; 1 Kings xviii. 46; 2 Kings iv. 29. The advice, therefore, reminds us of our present state of *pilgrimage*, as ch. ii. 11. We are but too much disposed to call our lands our own, and to take up our rest here. But the text tells us that we should hold ourselves in readiness to leave the world. *Convinced*, like the Psalmist,—"*I am a stranger*," &c., Ps. xxxix. 12,—we should, like him and other ancient worthies, "*declare plainly*" our conviction and desires, Heb. xi. 13—16, by *acting* accordingly. "Gird up the loins;" have all things, whether temporal or spiritual, in readiness, as Israel to leave Egypt, &c., 2 Kings xx. 1; 2 Tim. iv. 6—8.

(2.) *This "girding up," &c., was practised by servants, when they waited on their masters.* "Gird thyself and serve me." See Luke xii. 35, 37, xvii. 8. In this view it may denote that *cheerful and ready devotion* with which the christian, renouncing self-will and self-pleasing, should ever ask, "Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?" He should gird himself for any service, however mean, laborious, painful, or protracted, ch. ii. 13—21.

(3.) *Soldiers girded themselves for battle.* "Having your loins girt about with truth," Eph. vi. 14. This shows us the christian in his *militant state*, engaged in warfare with his three-fold enemy; and reminds us,—that opposition is to be expected, ch. iv. 12—14;—that we should be always prepared for resistance, ch. v. 8, 9;—and therefore should have all the accompaniments of the girdle of truth; namely, "the breastplate of righteousness," &c., Eph. vi. 10—17; and thus prepared, and praying always, verse 18, should *follow our captain*, and be led to certain victory.

2. "*Be sober,*" (or vigilant, Parkhurst,) a state equally distant from stupidity and carelessness, on the one hand, and the rashness of intoxication on the other. The opposite of intoxication by *strong drink*. Drunkenness, a swinish, abominable, ruinous practice, Isa. xxviii. 1—8; Prov. xxiii. 31, 32; 1 Cor. vi. 10. The opposite of intoxication by *excessive passion*, whether fear, anger, love or any other, Prov. xvi. 32; James i. 19. And consequently the opposite of intoxication by *worldly cares*, compounded of unholy love, desire, fear, anxiety, &c., in fearful and fatal mixture; or by *carnal pleasure*, which enervates and destroys, Luke xxi. 34; Isa. v. 11, 12; 1 Tim. v. 6.—This wakeful sobriety is *valuable*, inasmuch as it enables a person to see his danger, and to provide against it; and to perceive his advantages, and avail himself of them. And it is *necessary*; because without this the mind must be so distracted, as to be a prey to every enemy; and especially to our vigilant and crafty spiritual foes.

3. "*Hope to the end.*" We speak here of the *duty* of hoping or trusting amidst difficulties and discouragements. God gives grace; it is our place to exercise it on proper grounds afforded. Here they had to repose on the *work of redemption performed*, ver. 3, 16; the *word of promise afforded*, ver. 10—12, 25; and the *blessed effects* already produced in their experience, ver. 7, 8. This leads us to

II. THE CHRISTIAN'S EXPECTATION;—"The grace that is to be brought," &c. The word "grace," means any favor or benefit; the *revelation* of Jesus Christ, his coming to judgment, called ver. 7, "his *appearing*."

1. The word "*revelation*," seems to refer to his *appointment* by him who makes the revelation,—the eternal Father who has appointed the day, and committed all judgment to the Son, Acts xvii. 31; 1 Tim. vi. 15, 16

2. And it would lead us to consider the *manner*, the *purposes*, and the *results* of this revelation.—The manner *awfully glorious*: in the Judge's announcement, attendants, equipage, &c. Not now as formerly, Isa. liii. 2; John i. 10, but with the trump of God, angels, flaming fire, &c., Luke ix. 26; 1 Thess. iv. 16, 17; 2 Thess. i. 7, 8; Rev. xx. 11—13.—The purposes *awfully righteous*: to manifest the holiness and equity of God's government:—to convince and confound the ungodly,—and to vindicate the righteous against the accusations of Satan and his sons, Matt. xxv. 1—40. Jude 15; Rev. xii. 9, 10.—The results *awfully transporting or terrific*: Matt. xiii. 41—50, xxv. 41—46. In the one case, all the bliss of heaven; in the other, all the woes of hell.

3. But this will be throughout to the saints, a revelation of *grace*. Their bodies shall be *graciously* changed, Phil. iii. 12. In the separation, they

shall be *graciously* placed on the right. In *gracious* accents shall their Redeemer express his approval. Angels shall *graciously* conduct them; and Jesus graciously "present them before the presence of his glory;" &c. And in every case the grace shall be heightened *by contrast*. We would therefore,

1. Propose the solemn questions, Rom. ii. 3—10.
2. Enforce the important advice, "Acquaint now," &c., Job xxii. 21. And then urge the apostle's exhortation in our text, and join in his prayer, chap. v. 10, 11.

THE SABBATH

Exodus xx. 8.—Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy. (Sk.)

EVERY command of God is reasonable as it is divine; and is enjoined no less from regard to human happiness, than to secure the glory of the great Lawgiver. Those generally termed the ten commandments, stand prominently conspicuous in the sacred volume; and from the manner in which they were announced, the frequency with which they are introduced, and their essential connection with all good conduct, they present the strongest claims on our attention. You are aware, that our text forms a part of this sacred code, that it stands among these commandments, and is found in a part of the divine records which gives an account of God's delivering his law to mortals; and that it has the sanction which accompanies the mandates of heaven.

The institution of the Sabbath-day, and the manner in which we should regard it, are the topics which our text embraces; and those which now demand our serious attention.

THE INSTITUTION OF THE SABBATH.

1. By the Sabbath, we understand, a day rendered sacred, on account of divine appointment, and comprising, successively, a seventh portion of our time.

2. The institution of such a day, is not only divine; but, in order of time, it is prior to all other institutions which have a moral bearing on human conduct. Indeed, we trace its origin to the highest possible date, for the first seventh day was a Sabbath; blessed, sanctified, and kept: see Gen. ii. 2, 3.

3. No farther mention is made of the Sabbath-day, until Exod. xvi. 23, where it is referred to in such a manner, as shows, that Moses, at least, was well acquainted with its sacred character. Renewed sanction was given to this ordinance, when, as in the account before us, it was announced among, and made one of the ten words, or commandments, delivered with such awful authority as the context records. It is observable, however, that this command, in its introduction, is referred to as a thing well known; so much the word "remember," naturally suggests.

4. Admitting that there were peculiarities connected with the observance of this day among the Jews, and that some other days were termed Sabbaths in the Jewish ritual; suppose that some superstitious pretences respecting this day, when our Saviour was upon earth, were exploded by him; see Matt. xii. 1; Luke vi. 1, and xiii. 10; and John v. 1; and that he who

is the Lord of the Sabbath, changed the day from the seventh to the first; the day on which he arose from the dead; see John xvi. 12; Acts i. 2, 3; Matt. xxviii. 1; Acts xx. 7; 1 Cor xiv. 1; Rev. i. 10; will any, or all of such circumstances, bear us out in the disregard of an institution, so sacredly enjoined by God, and so importantly useful to the man? As well might we reject the precepts of justice because the Author of our mild dispensation substituted "Resist not evil," in the place of, "An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth;" or leave off divine worship, because an apostle said, "Let no man judge you, in respect of an holy day, or of the new moon, or of the Sabbath-days;" and abandon all christian ordinances, because the weak, or the wicked, blend superstition with observance, and are reproved by heaven for such conduct.

5. The manner in which a violation of this day was punished, Num. xv. 32—36; the reproofs given to those who treated it with inattention, Neh. xii. 17, 18; Ezek. xx. 21, xxii. 8, and xxiii. 38; and the promise made to such as should keep it holy, Isa. lvi. 2, 4, 6, 7, and lv. 13, 14; show, that the man who trifles with the sacredness of its appointment, exposes himself, in no small degree, to the divine displeasure. Let me, therefore, have your continued, and most serious attention, while I endeavor to show,

II. THE MANNER IN WHICH WE SHOULD REGARD IT. This is expressed in the text, by the words, "keep it holy;" which must signify—that the day should be separated from all common uses; and that it should be dedicated to services of a religious nature.

1. The former of these ideas is minutely illustrated in the subsequent part of the commandment; "In it thou shalt not do any work." &c. From which we learn, that the Sabbath is as much violated by us, if we employ our servants, or cattle, in ordinary purposes on that day, as if we were thus engaged ourselves. It is necessary, however, to observe, that works of real necessity were allowed; and that this is rendered evident—by the very nature of things;—by the conduct of those who were most strict in their attention to the Sabbath;—and by the sanction of the Lord Jesus himself; see Matt. xii. 11; Luke xiii. 15; John vii. 22.

2. The dedication of the day to religious services, is next to be considered. That such an idea is contained in the phrase, "keep it holy," appears evident from the following consideration:—As no common occupation was to engage the time or attention of individuals on this day, something religious must, or idleness would be the necessary consequence. It appears demonstrable from Leviticus xxiii. 2, 3, that on this day, the worship of God was to be publicly celebrated; and that such worship was to engage the attention of the people in their dwellings.—The usages of the Jews, as recorded by the evangelists, make it clear, that they did employ the Sabbath for such a purpose; see Luke iv. 16, and xiii. 10, and vi. 3.—And the conduct of the apostles shows, that under the christian dispensation, the seventh day, or the first, was regularly occupied in the worship of God: see Acts xiii. 14—42, and 44, and xvi. 13, xvii. 1, 2, xviii. 14, and xx. 7. The custom of the church of Christ, in all ages, might be adduced; but this appears unnecessary, as the most common reference to ecclesiastical history will satisfy any candid inquirer.

3. That works of mercy and of charity, whether they respect the bodies or the souls of men, are suitable exercises for some parts of the sacred day, none, I presume, will question. However, to keep the Sabbath-day holy, is not merely to abstain from common concerns, and to give regular attention to the externals of divine worship, but amidst all, to worship God in

spirit and in truth; and to consider the day and the services, as peculiarly belonging to God.

Let me exhort you, then "Remember the Sabbath-day, to keep it holy."

Do not *forget* the sacred day; or merely remember it, to treat it with profanity.

Remember it—because God commands you to do it;—because it is a most salutary institution;—because the Sabbath is a day highly honored of God;—because awful judgments have arrested many in the profanation of it;—because it is a type of heaven's eternal rest.

OBSERVANCE OF THE SABBATH ENJOINED.

Isaiah lviii. 13, 14.—If thou turn away thy foot from the Sabbath, from doing thy pleasure on my holy day; and call the Sabbath a delight, The holy of the Lord, Honorable; and shalt honor him, not doing thine own ways, nor finding thine own pleasure, nor speaking thine own words: then shalt thou delight thyself in the Lord; and I will cause thee to ride upon the high places of the earth, and feed thee with the heritage of Jacob thy father: for the mouth of the Lord hath spoken it. (H. H.)

THAT the observance of the Sabbath was intended to be of universal and perpetual obligation, does not admit of any reasonable doubt. It was enjoined to man in Paradise: and the commandment relating to it, when renewed to man at Mount Sinai, was, like all the other moral commandments, written by God himself on tables of stone. The Jewish prophets spake of it as to be continued under the gospel dispensation: see ch. lvi. 1, 4, 6; and the apostles evidently continued the observance of it, transferring it only from the last day of the week to the first, in commemoration of our Lord's resurrection from the dead, and of the work of redemption which was thereby completed. See John xx. 19, 26. Acts xx. 7. 1 Cor. xvi. 2. The ceremonial laws relating to it are abrogated; but the moral part of it is as much in force as ever.

In the passage before us we may see,

I. IN WHAT LIGHT WE SHOULD VIEW THE SABBATH—

The estimation in which it should be held is here variously expressed: we are taught to account that day,

1. Holy—

Whatever was consecrated to God under the law was accounted holy: it was separated from all profane or common use, and was employed solely for the ends and purposes for which it had been thus set apart. Thus the Sabbath, being consecrated to the especial service of God, is called in our text "God's holy day;" and, "The holy of the Lord." In the New Testament also it is called, "The Lord's day." Rev. i. 10. Hence it is obvious, that every part of it is to be regarded as the Lord's property, and to be improved for him alone. We should feel a veneration for it, precisely as we should for any thing else that had been dedicated to the Lord: and, as we shudder at the impiety of Belshazzar in using, at a feast, the sacred vessels which he had taken from Jerusalem, though he himself was not a worshipper of Jehovah; much more must we, who acknowledge the sanctity of the Sabbath, shudder at the thought of alienating any portion of it from Him, to whom it exclusively belongs.

2. Honorable—

If any man, under the law, had regarded the temple, the sacrifices, and the vessels of the sanctuary, in no other light than as a common house, or common utensils, or common food, he would have been considered as greatly dishonoring God. Thus the very sanctity of the Sabbath should render it "honorable" in our estimation; and we should labor to "honor it" by every possible expression of our regard.

3. Delightful—

The arrival of that day should be greeted by us with holy joy: we should say, "This is the day that the Lord has made; we will rejoice and be glad in it." If we could suppose an angel sent down to this lower world to labor in some common occupation, and permitted every seventh day to return to his heavenly abodes, and spend that day in the employments suited to his taste, with what delight would he look forward to the stated returns of that day! So should it be with us; and so it *will* be, in proportion as we have attained to the views and dispositions of those blessed spirits. Not that we should delight in it merely as a day of rest to the body, but as a day wherein God calls us, like Moses, to come up and commune with him on his Holy Mount: and, instead of abridging it, or complaining of it as long and wearisome, we should rather say, with Peter, "It is good for us to be here:" and should almost regret the arrival of the period when we must descend from the Mount, to the less-pleasing occupations of time and sense.

But we will proceed to state more particularly,

II. IN WHAT MANNER WE SHOULD EMPLOY IT—

In what manner we should *not* employ it, is here distinctly told us—

Worldly business, and carnal pleasure, and unprofitable conversation, are all expressly proscribed: "we must not do our own ways, nor find our own pleasure, nor speak our own words." On all the other days of the week we may find time for these things; but on the Sabbath-day they are to be excluded altogether. It is a grievous mistake to imagine, that after the public services of the day we are at liberty to engage in vain pursuits, invented only to beguile the time, which otherwise would be a burthen upon our hands: there are pursuits proper to the day; and in them exclusively should our time be occupied. We do not mean to say, that such things as can neither be anticipated nor postponed may not be done with innocence: for even under the law, a latitude was allowed in relation to "what every man must eat." *Exod. xii. 16.* In reference to such things as are really necessary, we are authorized to say, that "God will have mercy, and not sacrifice:" but it becomes all to be on their guard, that they do not deceive their own souls; for God can easily distinguish the hidden motives of the heart; and will surely judge our actions as good or evil, according as their quality shall be found in his eyes. If the infringement of the Sabbath be reluctant, as in the extinguishing of a fire, or in the exercise of compassion to man or beast, it is well; but if we be actuated by considerations of ease, or interest, or pleasure, to alienate from God any of that time which ought to be consecrated to his service, we may be assured that we must answer for it in the day of judgment.

Our one aim on that day must be, to "honor God"—

The services which we are to render to our God on that day are various, and all compatible with each other. The first undoubtedly are *private*: we should give ourselves in a more peculiar manner to reading, to meditation, to prayer. On every day we should search the scriptures, but more especially on that day; applying them to our own hearts, examining ourselves by them,

and intreating God to make them effectual for the conversion and salvation of our souls. From our closets we should go to worship God in *public*, and to testify before all, our regard for his authority, and our delight in his service. Whilst engaged in the various offices of prayer, or hearing of the word, or of communicating at the table of the Lord, we should be particularly careful that the frame of our minds be suited to the employment in which we are engaged; lest, whilst we profess to be serving God, we be found only mocking and insulting him by hypocritical professions. In the intervals, when we are disengaged from private or public duties, we may relieve our minds, and improve our time, in such as are of a social nature. The visiting of the sick, the comforting of the afflicted, the instructing of the rising generation, and, above all, the endeavoring to teach our children and servants, and to "bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord," are services well pleasing to God, and admirably suited to the sanctity of that holy day. It is much to be feared that this latter duty in particular is sadly neglected, even in religious families; and that the great predilection that has been manifested by the religious world for public services, has brought into disuse those more self-denying offices which formerly occupied a considerable portion of the Sabbath-day. But, in whichever of these duties we are occupied, our great aim must be, to "honor God;" demeaning ourselves as in his more immediate presence, and endeavoring to approve ourselves to him as faithful servants.

And shall the Sabbath, in this view of it, be accounted a day of gloom? No; we shall have far other sentiments of it, if we consider,

III. THE BENEFITS WE MAY EXPECT FROM A DUE OBSERVANCE OF IT—

Whatever reference there may be in our text to the return of the Jews from their captivity in Babylon, we cannot doubt but the promises here made have a higher and more spiritual import. In them we are assured, that, if we really keep the Sabbath as we ought, we shall be blessed with,

1. Delight in God—

There is not any thing which God more delights to honor than a due observance of the Sabbath. We may perform the outward duties of that day, and reap no material benefit: but if we truly and earnestly endeavor to honor God in the way before described, God will draw nigh to us, and reveal himself to us, and fill us with joy and peace in believing. And here we confidently make our appeal to all who have ever labored to spend a Sabbath to the Lord, whether they have not found such a measure of grace and peace flowing into their souls, as has abundantly recompensed their utmost exertions? Who must not acknowledge that one day thus spent in the courts and in the service of Jehovah, is better than a thousand passed amongst the vain delights of this world? Ps. lxxxiv. 4, 10. And where the Sabbath is thus habitually honored, we will venture to say, that such happiness will at times flow into the soul, as David experienced, when he said, "My soul shall be satisfied as with marrow and fatness, whilst my mouth praiseth thee with "joyful lips:" Ps. lxiii. 5; yes, "they shall be satisfied with the fatness of God's house; and he will make them drink of the river of his pleasures." Ps. xxxvi. 8.

2. Victory over our spiritual enemies—

This seems to be the import of that expression, "I will cause thee to ride upon the high places of the earth:" compare Deut. xxxii. 13, and xxxiii. 29; and it shall be fulfilled to all who conscientiously improve their Sabbaths to the glory of their God. Too many of those who profess religion, are, it must be confessed, scarcely, if at all, advancing in the divine life: their evil

dispositions still retain such an ascendant over them, as to make them go on heavily all their days. But, if we were to inquire how they spent their Sabbaths, and what efforts they made to glorify God in their public, private, and social duties, we should soon find the reason of their slow progress. As our Lord said of some particular evil spirits, "These go not out, but by prayer and fasting," so we may say of the evils which are predominant in many professors of religion. They do not give way, because such slight efforts are made upon the Sabbath to subdue them. If that day were truly and entirely devoted to the Lord, Satan would no longer retain the ungodly as his vassals, nor be able to exert so much influence over those who have professedly cast off his yoke.

3. The full possession of the heavenly Canaan—

That land which was given to Jacob for his inheritance, was typical of the Canaan that is above, which truly "floweth with milk and honey." And it may be safely affirmed, that no person who conscientiously employed his Sabbaths here, ever did, or ever can, fall short of the heavenly rest. Thousands who have perished by the hand of the public executioner, have traced their shame and misery to a neglect of the Sabbath: but never was an instance known of one who duly improved his Sabbaths being left to die under the dominion of his sins. Indeed the services of the Sabbath cannot possibly consist with indulged and wilful sin: on the contrary, they are both a preparation for heaven, and a foretaste of it: on earth the saints behold their God by faith, but in heaven they will behold him face to face: on earth they, as it were, learn and rehearse their parts: and in heaven they will join the full chorus of saints and angels in everlasting hallelujahs to God and to the Lamb.

SEE hence,

1. How reasonable are the requirements of God in his gospel!

Had God required six days out of the seven to be spent in such exercises, it would have been highly reasonable that we should obey him: how much more when he gives us six for earthly business, and requires only one to be consecrated entirely unto him! If the services of that day were ever so painful, they might well be claimed by Him who has done such great things for us: and how much more when they are so delightful and so profitable! Grudge him not then that day, nor any portion of it: but let it be wholly and unreservedly devoted to his service.

2. How just will be the condemnation of those who disobey them!

A person who has attained to fifty years of age, has had *above seven years of Sabbaths*. O what blessings might not have been secured in that time, if all those Sabbaths had been sanctified to the Lord! and what judgments does not he merit, who has wasted all of them in a wilful neglect of God! Little as we think of Sabbaths now, we shall find ere long, that the profaning of them has greatly increased our guilt and misery. The Lord grant that this day may not pass away as so many others have done, unprofitably to our souls; but let it be to every one of us a preparation for our eternal rest!

CHILDREN INSTRUCTED TO FEAR GOD.

Psalm xxxi. 11.—Come, ye children, hearken unto me; I will teach you the fear of the Lord. (B.)

SUCH was once the language of a king, a “man after God’s own heart,” and a prophet. What a commendation is contained in these words of all schools and institutions, the object of which is the religious instruction of children and young persons!

Inquire we,

I. WHAT WE ARE TO UNDERSTAND BY “THE FEAR OF THE LORD.”

“Fear,” like hope, desire, love, joy, or sorrow, is an affection of the human soul, and is good or bad, laudable, or the contrary, according as the object by which it is excited is good or bad, and according to the degree in which it is excited. The fear here spoken of has God for its object, and cannot be excessive, if it be of the right kind. For, we can no more *fear* than we can love, or desire, or rejoice in him too much, or expect too great things from him; supposing our fear of him be rational and scriptural.

It must not be a fear of terror or dread, unless we be going on in sin, and be under its guilt and power, in which case it is quite proper we should be afraid of his wrath.— — —

Nor is it a fear of timidity, dejection, and discouragement; unless that we must be discouraged from hoping for prosperity, protection, or happiness, while we continue in a state of enmity and disobedience to him.

Nor is it a fear of diffidence, distrust, or suspicion, as if he would not fulfil his promises, or make good his word.

But it is a fear of reverence; from a sense of his glory and majesty. Jer. x. 7; Heb. xii. 28.—Of awe and concern, from a sense of his power, wisdom, holiness, justice, and of our ignorance, sinfulness, and guilt. Jer. v. 21, 22. Matth. x. 28.—Of subjection; termed a “godly fear;” Heb. xii. 28; from a sense of his goodness, as well as power and wisdom, producing a disposition to obey him. Isa. i. 10.—Of watchfulness and circumspection; from a sense of his omnipresence and omniscience. Prov. xxviii. 14.

With respect to the properties of this fear, we may observe, it is awakening, alarming, humbling, restraining from evil, constraining to good.

The whole of religion is here meant by the fear of God. This is generally termed the “fear of God” in the Old Testament, Gen. xx. 11. xiii. 18. Ps. xix. 9, and the “love of God” in the New. Gal. v. 6. 1 Cor. xiii. 13.— — —

It is religion in the heart, and in experience; in opposition to that in the head, and in speculation merely.—In reality and in practice; in opposition to that in profession, and in pretence.—Internally, and in power; in opposition to that externally, and in form.—In its principle and source, therefore, steady and permanent; in opposition to that which is assumed, inconstant, and transitory.

II. HOW IT APPEARS THAT IT IS OF IMPORTANCE TO TEACH THIS TO CHILDREN AND OTHERS.

It is infinitely reasonable that we should reverence a Being so glorious, stand in awe of one so powerful and holy, be subject to one so good, be watchful under the eye of one so omniscient. All the divine perfections and the relations in which he stands to us, show the reasonableness of the particulars above mentioned, as comprehended in the fear of God.

It is in its beginning, the "beginning of wisdom;" in its progress, the progress of wisdom. Thus David, Ps. cxi. 10, Solomon, Prov. i. 7, ix. 10, and Job, ch. xxviii. 28.

This, and only this, raises man above the brute creatures. They reason, in a measure, as well as man, but are not capable of religion. It is this, above every thing, which ennobles, and perfects human nature.

It provides a remedy for the follies and actual misconduct, into which we naturally fall, in the government of our minds and actions, as also the irregularity and exorbitancy of the appetites and passions.— —

It imparts a higher excellence and value to all human attainments, and directs us, in the employment of them, to regard the interest of our fellow creatures, and the glory of God.— —

It is the means of providing, most effectually, for our comfort in the present life, and for our everlasting felicity in the next.— —

Hence it appears that it is our interest to possess this religion.—*Temporally*; "Godliness having the promise of the life that now is, as well as of that which is to come;" of the necessities of life; Matt. vi. 33; of all things useful, Ps. lxxxiv. 11, xxxii. 9, 10; of deliverance from trouble, ver. 4—6, 19—*Spiritually*; It makes us partakers of the unsearchable riches of Christ; pardon, the divine favor, adoption, regeneration, progressive renovation, direction in our difficulties, protection in dangers, ver. 7, answers to prayer, deliverance from troubles, ver. 15—18.

Therefore, it is our happiness. We have thereby peace with God, peace of mind, hope of immortality, joy in the Holy Ghost, communion with God, the fellowship of saints, the moderate enjoyment of the creature.

Consider the honor of it. It may, indeed, be attended with reproach among the ignorant and wicked but it is truly to our honor, as it is so reasonable and excellent, and as we thus imitate the wisest and best men that ever lived, the angels of God, and even Christ himself; nay, and thus we become godlike. It will be our eternal glory. Hereby, and hereby only, is our nature advanced to the dignity of which it is capable.—

Consider its amiableness in all, especially in young persons.—

Now, if religion be thus reasonable, wise, advantageous, happy, honorable, we cannot have it too soon.—And it is peculiarly for the honor of God, the good of society in general, and the comfort and advantage of their parents and friends in particular, and their own individual comfort, that children and young persons should be religious.

Hence piety towards God, benevolence to man, especially to the rising generation, and even self-interest, should induce us to say, with the royal Psalmist and Prophet, "Come, ye children, hearken unto me: I will teach you the fear of the Lord." I will do it myself, or I will do it by my substitute.—I will contribute from my fortune to have it done, or I will attend myself and see it done. I will promote it every way in my power.

III. How IT MAY BE TAUGHT THEM BEST, MOST SURELY, AND MOST LASTINGLY.

By instruction.—We must instruct them to know themselves, their ignorance, weakness, guilt, depravity.—To know God, his nature and attributes and the relations in which he stands to his creatures.—To know Christ, in his person, and offices, his love, and sufferings.—

We must instruct them to know the way of salvation, the will of God, their duty, and their happiness.—To know the scriptures in order thereto.—To read and meditate. 2 Tim. iii. 15, 16.

By reproof, exhortation, corrections, rewards.—

By showing them a good example in all respects.—

By praying with and for them, and putting them on praying for themselves, and habituating them to public, social, family, and private worship.—

GLORIFYING GOD IN ALL THINGS.

1 Cor. x. 31.—Whether therefore ye eat, or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God. (P.)

THE word of God is of inestimable value, as it furnishes us with a complete directory how we may glorify God, and enjoy him for ever. The general rule contained in the text will afford particular direction to every lively christian who is anxious to know how he may best glorify him whose name he bears. The particular occasion of the words may be learned from the context; but they are fully applicable to us, and we may found upon them this grand maxim, that *it is the duty of christians, in all their actions, whether civil or religious, to aim at the glory of God.* It is impossible, indeed, to add to, or diminish from the essential glory of God. No mortal can, by any exertion, add to the splendor of the meridian sun; and it would be equally foolish for any mortal to imagine that he can add any thing to the glory of God. Yet it is not enough for us to be passive instruments here. The heavens, the animal, vegetable, and mineral tribes, display the glory of God *silently*; man is to do it *actively*. Christians are formed anew for this express purpose, that they may be a holy and peculiar people, zealous of good works. Let us apply the maxim I have stated,

I. TO RELIGIOUS DUTIES. We are to glorify God,

1. By *believing in the Lord Jesus Christ*—"This is the work of God, that we believe in his Son Jesus Christ." Not to believe God, is to dishonor him—to make him a liar. The gospel is an authoritative system; it is revealed for the *obedience* of faith. Thus Abraham, by being strong in faith, glorified God: in how many instances he did this, his history will inform you. Like him, we must believe that God's promises are true, and that they shall be performed.

2. By *our repentance*. Impenitence dishonors God, by supposing that he winks at sin, or that he does not observe it. By making confession of sin, we give glory to God. We glorify his holiness, by which he hates sin; his omniscience, by which he discovers it. Thus the prodigal honored his father by his confession and his hopes; thus the publican glorified God, while the pharisee glorified himself; thus the thief on the cross honored Christ, and thus all true penitents honor him.

3. By *our obedience* in general. And here true faith is manifested, for faith works by love. God is pleased to esteem himself glorified by the *worship* of his people—"Give unto God the glory due unto his name: worship before him in the beauty of holiness." God is dishonored in the world by idolatry, and by the homage rendered to the creature, and it becomes christians to be seen in public engaged in acts of solemn worship. *Prayer* is an act of homage, for in it we own that all our supplies are from him. *Praise*—"Whoso offereth praise, glorifieth me." In the ancient dispensation, all that

could excite to gratitude was employed, and it should be still more so in the christian church—*by a devout observance of his holy day*, Isa. lviii. 13,—*by an attentive hearing of his word*: thus Mary honored Christ more than Martha—*by reading his word with simplicity*—*by making a public profession of our attachment to him*—*by uniting with his people*—*by celebrating his dying love*.

4. *By our calm submission* to his chastening rod. None can hope to be exempt from these visitations. But if we “have had fathers of our flesh which corrected us, and we gave them reverence, shall we not much rather be in subjection to the Father of spirits, and live?” He is the ruler of the world, wise and good; it is our duty to glorify him in the fire, when we receive evil from his hand as well as when we receive good. Thus Job glorified him, and said, “The Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away, blessed be the name of the Lord.” Apply the maxim,

II. *TO CIVIL OR COMMON ACTIONS.* Generally speaking, we are to glorify God in these actions, by doing all *in love*; for love is the fulfilling of the law—by our meekness, our patience, our usefulness. Thus we are to “let our light so shine before men, that they, seeing our good works, may glorify our Father which is in heaven.”

But more particularly we are to glorify God,

1. *In our actions.* In order to this, they must be *lawful*; they must be pursued at *lawful times*—not performed on the Sabbath, for instance; and in a *lawful degree*: we shall not glorify God by destroying our health, by neglecting the private or public duties of religion, by inattention to our families, &c. We glorify God in the common actions of life.

By aiming in them all at obedience to his will, and submission to his appointments. Servants and masters are thus exhorted to serve the Lord Christ, and to do all in his name.

By seeking for his blessing on all our endeavors. “Go to now, ye that say we will go into such a city, and continue there a year, and buy and sell, and get gain; for that ye ought to say if the Lord will, we shall live, and do this or that.”

By ascribing all our success entirely to him. We must not burn incense to our own net. Herod dishonored God when he was so elated with the people's shouting. So did Nebuchadnezzar when he said, “Is not this great Babylon that I have built by the might of my power, and for the honor of my majesty?” So all dishonor God who ascribe to themselves the contrivance, the execution, the completion of their works. We should glorify God,

2. *In our enjoyments.* “Whether ye eat or drink,” &c. Not by *excess*, for this would dishonor God and ourselves too, but

By humbly acknowledging our unworthiness, as did the poor old woman, who, while eating her crust by the side of a brook of which she was about to drink, exclaimed, “All this and Christ too!” When we sit down to our tables, it becomes us to say, with David, “Who am I, O Lord God, and what is my house, that thou shouldst thus deal with me?”

By adoring the bounty of God in bestowing these things upon us. We are to regard them not as the purchase of our money, but as the gifts of his bounty, who as a parent supplies the wants of his children.

By considering the love of Christ, who was poor and destitute and self-denying, that we might have all things richly to enjoy.

By aiming to employ our health and strength and life to the service of God, that so in all things we may adorn the gospel of God our Saviour.

By rising from the enjoyment of vanishing pleasures to the contemplation of heavenly satisfactions. Looking up to Christ as the food of the soul, and longing for the day when we shall eat bread and drink wine in the kingdom of God. **INFERENCES.**—

1. *How is man fallen?* If it be the duty of all to glorify God in all things, what a wretched being is man become! There are some who never perform one action to the glory of God. How displeasing, how dishonorable to God!

2. *How do we all stand in need of pardoning mercy!* We have not only committed *sinful* actions, but what has been *good*, has been done without proper motives, and with too much of self. When we read, when we pray, when we hear, when we give alms, we have often sought our own honor and advantage more than the glory of God. Let us seek forgiveness then.

3. *How necessary is regeneration!* If man by nature is indisposed to seek the glory of God, how important is it that he should be made a new creature, that new powers and dispositions should be infused into his soul, that the love of God should be shed abroad in his heart!

4. *How important is it to bear the rule of the text in mind continually.* Amidst the many things which present themselves to our notice, some are altogether unlawful, and others are inexpedient; but this maxim would always determine us, and set us right. Should two duties present themselves to us at the same time, we need only ask this plain, simple question, “By which of these actions shall I most glorify God?”

CHAPTER VI.

WARNINGS.

SINNERS ADMONISHED.

Prov. i. 23.—Turn you at my reproof: behold, I will pour out my Spirit unto you, I will make my words known unto you. (Sk.)

VARIOUS are the means which the Lord employs to convince the wicked of the error of their ways, and bring them to a knowledge of divine truth. He has not only sent his Son, to seek and to save that which was lost, but he also waits to be gracious; and is “long-suffering, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance.” He, therefore, invites the most abandoned to participate the blessings of his salvation, and encourages them to believe, by the most powerful persuasions and captivating motives;—he mercifully pities the folly, and justly complains of the incorrigible obstinacy of the impenitent;—he frequently visits them with the tokens of his displeasure, and faithfully warns them of the danger to which they are exposed;—but as he is “good to all,” he suspends the execution of his wrath, and gives them *space* to repent and believe the gospel;—and as he hath no pleasure in the destruction of sinners, he kindly admonishes them to escape the ruin of sin, and graciously promises the richest blessing to the truly penitent. Such is evidently the import of his affectionate address to mankind, in the language of the text, “Turn you at my

reproof," &c. These words also describe the Lord's dealings with his sinful creatures in reference to—the *reproofs he administers—the submission he requires—and the encouragement he imparts.*

I. THE REPROOFS HE ADMINISTERS;—"Turn you at my reproof." We are surrounded with faithful admonishers, who are all *arranged and employed* by God, to win the hearts of the disobedient to the wisdom of the just. He reproves us,

1. *By the scriptures.* His word contains the most *pointed and salutary* admonitions; it records the appropriate cautions and solemn warnings of Moses and the prophets—of Jesus Christ and his apostles, Rom. xv. 4; 2 Tim. iii. 16, 17.—It also repeatedly sends us for instruction and reproof to the works of creation—to admonitory examples of impiety—and the awful solemnities of death and the grave, Isaiah i. 2, 3; Prov. vi. 6; Matt. xi. 20—24; Deut. xxxii. 29; Eccl. ix. 10;—we are faithfully reproofed in every part of the sacred writings. Let us hear and live.

2. *By ministers.* They are sent to warn the wicked of their danger, and show them the way of salvation.—They zealously persuade men by the terrors of the Lord, and encourage them by the promise of the Gospel;—as "ambassadors for Christ," they pray you, in his stead, to be reconciled to God. You have often heard their reproofs—witness their labors—and beheld their tears. But have you taken warning? Have you believed their report? Have you realized the truth of their message? Acts xxvi. 18; Col. i. 28.

3. *By conscience.* This in an *internal and universal* monitor—it is always with us, and cannot be silenced—it is a *witness* to all our proceedings, and irresistibly *arraigns and condemns* the guilty culprit, Rom. ii. 15. It speaks with *sovereign authority*, and its awful criminations fill the trembling sinner with inexpressible *anguish and bitterness* of soul, Prov. xviii. 14. Has it not often accused you of crimes, alarmed your fears, and warned you of approaching danger? Does it not frequently testify of your sinful state, and assure you that except you repent you must perish?

4. *By providence.* There is a perfect *harmony* between the purposes of God, and the arrangement of his works. "Day unto day uttereth speech, and night unto night sheweth knowledge." The Lord often reproves us by pious parents—family connections—and godly neighbors. He also admonishes us, by afflictions and difficulties, to teach us the frailty of nature—the folly of sin—and the vanity of the world. The continual dissolution of our fellow-mortals, speaks loudly to survivors, and says to all, "prepare to meet your God—be ye also ready," &c. The *gracious design* of the Divine reprover will appear by considering,

II. THE SUBMISSION HE REQUIRES. "Turn you at my reproof." Through sin we have all forsaken the Lord, and "gone astray like lost sheep;" but he kindly *reproves* our folly, and *invites* us to return unto him,

1. *With penitent hearts.* We cannot come to him on the ground of *innocence* or personal worthiness; and as *guilty sinners* we ought to approach him "with broken and contrite hearts;" which are sacrifices highly becoming the creature, and always acceptable to the Creator, Ps. li. 17.—Genuine repentance includes—conviction of sin—humiliation of soul—compunction of spirit—holy indignation and shame—and humble confession to God, Luke xv. 17—19; 1 John i. 8, 9. "Repent ye, therefore, and be converted."

2. *With believing minds.* Jesus Christ is the *only way* to the Father, and the *medium* of all spiritual blessings;—through him, therefore, we

must return to God, *believing* in his name, and *trusting* in his merits;—it is by faith we credit the gospel—embrace the Saviour—and realize salvation, John iii. 18; Acts xvi. 31. “He that believeth shall be saved;” for Christ is “able to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by him.”

3. *With fervent devotion.* The Lord must be sought by earnest prayer, as the object of adoration and the source of blessedness; though he knows our necessities, yet he will be inquired of for the communication of his blessings. We should call upon him sincerely—humbly—confidently—fervently—and diligently.—Prayer eminently distinguishes the character of every returning penitent, and God will assuredly hear and answer their requests, Luke xviii. 13; Acts ix. 11; Matt. vii. 7, 8.

4. *With prompt obedience.* The service of God, and the paths of sin, are *incompatible*, and can never be reconciled, Matt. vi. 24;—we must, therefore, cease to do evil, and learn to do well.—Religion requires a *universal* renunciation of the *principles* and *habits* of vice, and an entire devotedness to God, both of heart and life, Isa. lv. 6, 7; Titus ii. 12; Luke i. 74, 75. We should be induced thus to turn to God by,

III. THE ENCOURAGEMENT HE IMPARTS. “Behold I will pour out my Spirit,” &c. This promise is highly important and comprehensive. The participation of the Holy Ghost is an inestimable privilege which includes every *holy principle* that he implants, and every *gracious disposition* which he inspires. The Spirit of God is,

1. *A convincing Spirit.* Under *this* character he is poured out upon all mankind, John xvi. 8—11. It is his special province to open the eyes of our understanding, that we may understand the scriptures;—by him the Lord makes “known his *words* unto us;”—he imparts a spiritual *discernment*, that we may discover our real state and character, and comprehend “the truth as it is in Jesus,” 1 Cor. ii. 10—12.

2. *A quickening Spirit.* He removes the death of sin, and infuses the life of grace;—he graciously dwells in his people, and by his *vital influence* they are born again, and become new creatures;—he witnesses their adoption, and fills them with “the fruits of righteousness,” Rom. viii. 15, 16; Gal. v. 22, 23. It is the Spirit *quickeneth* and *giveth life* and peace to the soul, Eph. ii. 1.

3. *A comforting Spirit.* All real consolation is *divine* in its author, and *spiritual* in its nature;—it is the immediate *production* and fruit of the Holy Ghost, Rom. xiv. 17;—he communicates ample support and comfort in every time of need;—he is, therefore, repeatedly styled “the Comforter.” Through his sacred energy, we receive joy and peace in believing; and “rejoice evermore—pray without ceasing—and in every thing give thanks.”

4. *A sanctifying Spirit.* He is justly denominated the “Spirit of holiness;”—all his operations are *hallowing*, and productive of christian *purity*;—he transforms the soul into the image and glory of God, Titus iii. 5; 2 Cor. iii. 18.—His baptismal fire *consumes* sin, and *purifies* the sinner, Matt. iii. 11, 12;—he sanctifies his people *wholly*, and preserves them *blameless*, unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, 1 Thess. v. 23. Let us therefore now consider our ways, and turn unto the Lord, that we may receive the gift of the Holy Ghost, which he has promised to them that repent and call upon his name, Luke xi. 13.

A CAUTION AGAINST DECEPTION.

Deut. xi. 16.—Take heed to yourselves, that your heart be not deceived. (Sk)

It is one essential characteristic in christian charity, that it “suffereth long and is kind.” It not only suffers all the insults, provocations, and maliciousness of a persecuting world; but all the frailties, imperfections, and errors of the children of God. And never was there a more illustrious example of this long-suffering charity than Moses, who dictated the sentiment in the text. He had for a series of years borne with the insults of Israel. He had instructed them in their ignorance, he had reclaimed them in their wanderings, he had interceded for them in their dangers, and now, though about to be taken from them, and go up unto mount Nebo, over against Jericho, to die there; yet he is most tenderly concerned for their future welfare. In this chapter, after having reminded Israel of what God had done for them, ver. 4, 5, 6, 7, he directs them to consider what he was about to do, verse 10. And knowing the propensity which they had to neglect their immortal interests, and turn aside after other gods, he urges upon their attention the sentiment in the text, “Take heed to yourselves,” &c. We notice here,

I. AN EVIL ANTICIPATED. That of having the heart deceived.

II. A CAUTION URGED AGAINST IT. “Take heed to yourselves,” &c.

To be deceived is to be imposed upon, deluded, brought into error, so as to be led to entertain ideas and sentiments inconsistent with the truth. Men generally are liable to be deceived. We may be deceived *concerning ourselves*; we may think of ourselves more highly than we ought to think, and give ourselves credit for the possession of virtues to which we are total strangers: we may be vain in our imaginations, suppose that we are wise, when in God’s sight we are fools; and think ourselves safe, when danger is at the very door. We may be deceived, *concerning God*. Concerning *his nature*; we may say in our hearts that there is no God, or imagine that God is altogether such a one as ourselves. Concerning *his laws*; we may think that they are not as pure, as spiritual, and as extensive as they really are. We may be deceived *concerning religion*. We may substitute mere morality, a sound creed, or a pompous profession, instead of a saving conversion to God, and a sanctification of the soul to his service. These, with a thousand other deceptive suggestions, and erroneous thoughts, may occupy our minds, and lead us astray. In proof of the possibility of deception in reference to the concerns of our souls, we observe,

1. *The scantiness and imperfection of human knowledge*. Absolute knowledge precludes the possibility of deception; if we knew every thing, and every thing perfectly, we could not be deceived. But what little we do know, we know very imperfectly. With the objects of sense we are most intimately acquainted, but our eyes, and ears, and palate, and feelings, have deceived us. Religion requires the exercise of the intellectual faculties, and as our knowledge is so limited and defective, we may be deceived. We infer it,

2. *From the deceitfulness of the heart*. “The heart is deceitful above all things.” A deceived heart turns us aside. Hence we are in love with deception, and will not come to the light that our deeds might be manifest. When Elisha told Hazael of the horrible acts of cruelty that he would commit in after life, he so far thought it impossible that he should ever arrive at such a climax in crime, as to rip up women with child, that he said, “What!

Is thy servant a dog that he should do this great thing?" 2 Kings viii. 12
13. The possibility of being deceived, appears,

3. *From the deceitfulness of sin.* Sin is deceitful. It promises rewards, but pays punishment; and it would lose its power, could we strip it of its deceit. Hence it seldom appears in its own native character, or is designated by its own legitimate title. Revenge is called honor; covetousness, frugality; luxury and extravagance, good living; lust and obscenity, innocent liberties; and there is scarcely a crime committed, but what has some of its malignity softened down, to render it more fascinating and deceptive; and as proofs of the deceitfulness of sin, we might advert to the pleas and subterfuges to which men resort in order to conceal it from the public eye, or lessen its evil when detected. Because sin is so deceitful, we are liable to be deceived. We infer it also,

4. *From the deceitfulness of the world.* The great mass of mankind are involved in deception. Every sinner is a deceiver, he deceives himself, and labors to deceive others. He sports himself with his own deceivings. Would men deliberately prefer darkness to light, bondage to liberty, peril to safety, and misery to happiness, if they were not most awfully deceived? Would acts of sin, and crimes of the most heinous character be extolled, and idolized; and acts of piety be defamed and scandalized, if delusions deep as hell had not seized their unhappy subjects? How few men *appear* to be what they are in reality! How many would shudder at the thought of appearing in their true character! How much moral deformity is often concealed beneath a decent, and perhaps a religious exterior! How many whited walls and painted sepulchres present themselves to our view! We are also liable to be deceived,

5. *From the deceitfulness of the devil.* The devil is the most deceitful being in existence. All the deception upon earth owes its origin to his influence. He is the deceiver of the nations. He deceived Eve, the mother of us all, and he has been practicing the same infernal policy, in all climes and ages. And his success has been without a parallel. Such are the reasons we have for believing, that our hearts may be deceived. But the text assumes that this deception is an evil pregnant with very pernicious consequences. And this appears from the consideration, that *those whose hearts are deceived are involved in a state of the most palpable error.* Error of any kind is to be deplored. What tradesman would wish to make errors in his accounts? What scholar that would not guard against error in his sums? But these errors are trivial, when compared to the grievous error in which those are involved whose hearts are deceived; who are deceived concerning their souls, their salvation, and their God. Nor is this all; those whose hearts are deceived, are exposed to extreme danger. "He that converteth a sinner from the error of his ways, shall save a soul from death." The death of the soul is a tremendous death; a double death, a second death; and to this death every sinner whose heart is deceived is constantly exposed: "Wo unto them that call evil good," &c.: "therefore as the fire devoureth the stubble," &c., Isa. v. 20—24. See the verse subsequent to the text. Let us examine,

II. THE CAUTION URGED AGAINST THIS DECEPTION. "Take heed to yourselves," &c.

1. *Be alive to a sense of your extreme danger.* No man will use caution where he suspects no danger. Our senses furnish us with intimations of the dangers to which the body is exposed; but alas! to the dangers of the soul, though infinitely more alarming, we are too frequently insensible

Who that surveys the mirth, and jollity, and merriment of the multitude would at all suspect that they were in any danger, or exposed to any peril? But who that reads the Bible with attention can fail to be convinced, that we are threatened with the most tremendous punishment? Now in order that we may take heed to ourselves, let us be broad awake to our danger. Let us consider what we are,—how deeply fallen! Let us weigh well our circumstances, dangers, and enemies; this will lay the foundation for caution and circumspection.

2. *Seek for the illuminating and sanctifying influences of the Holy Spirit.* The mind of man is so completely darkened by the deceitfulness of sin, that he has naturally no perceptions of his danger; but the Holy Ghost opens the eyes of our understanding, and we see the truth, and begin to know ourselves. But illumination alone is not sufficient; our powers must be renewed, we must become new creatures in Christ Jesus. Your danger may be perceived, but without the renewal of your hearts in righteousness, you will possess no mental energy to avoid it. The Holy Ghost will illuminate and sanctify you. O seek his influence by fervent, importunate prayer. “Take heed to yourselves.”

3. *By the constant practice of self-examination.* Examine yourselves whether ye be in the faith. Whether you have the fruits of faith. Whether you are the followers of them who through faith and patience have inherited the promises. Examine yourselves *faithfully*: self-love leads us to look partially on ourselves;—*frequently*: never suffer a day to pass over your heads without an investigation of your conduct. It was the advice of an old heathen,

“Let not the stealing god of sleep surprise,
Nor creep in slumber o’er thy weary eyes,
Ere every action of the former day,
Strictly thou dost and righteously survey.”

“Take heed to yourselves,”

4. *By watching over yourselves.* “Watch and pray.” “Be ye therefore sober, and watch unto prayer.” “Watch thou in all things.” These are scriptural directions, and were addressed to the primitive saints. Watchfulness will lead you to keep a strict guard over your thoughts. Your thoughts will wander on forbidden objects, but by watchfulness you will detect them: vain, foolish, and lascivious thoughts will seek to obtrude on your attention. Take heed to yourselves in reference to your words and actions.

Conclude, by urging the text on the attention of hearers of all descriptions.

People of all ages, young and old.—Of all circumstances, rich and poor.—Of all relations, husbands and wives, parents and children, masters and servants.—Of all callings, preachers and people.—“Take heed to yourselves.”

THE FOLLY OF A FRUITLESS PROFESSION

Luke vi. 46.—Why call ye me Lord, Lord, and do not the things which I say? (S. S.)

THE honor of Christ and the salvation of our souls depend on our having right views of the gospel!—

We cannot therefore too earnestly insist on the doctrine of justification by faith in Christ—

Nevertheless we should constantly urge the practice of good works as the fruits and evidences of our faith in Christ—

The folly of expecting salvation while we neglect them is strongly represented by our Lord in the text—

I. SHEW WHO THEY ARE THAT DESERVE THE CENSURE IN THE TEXT—

The heathens have less to aggravate their sins than christians—

The greater part of those who live in countries that are evangelized are obnoxious to this censure—

1. Mere nominal christians deserve it.

Many are Christ's as having been devoted to him in baptism—

By the appellation of christians they profess to be his followers—

But they are in no respect subject to his will and word—

Christ commands them to "seek first the kingdom of God," &c. and they seek it last—

2. Formal, self-righteous persons deserve it.

Many will go far in the outward duties of religion—

They will profess too a veneration for the name of Christ—

But he calls them to regeneration, John iii. 3, and they deny their need of it—

He bids them live by faith on him, and it proves an hard saying—John vi. 53, 60.

They are satisfied with the form of godliness, without the power—

3. False professors deserve it.

None are so worthy of reproof as they—

They will talk much of their dependence on Christ—

They will profess perhaps to have experienced much of his power and grace—

They may even glory in the recollection of his truth and faithfulness—

But in the midst of all, they can be proud, covetous, passionate, censorious, unforgiving, deceitful and dishonest—

To such the text may be applied with peculiar energy—

Such persons ought to be addressed with all plainness of speech.

II. EXPOSTULATE WITH THEM ON THE FOLLY OF THEIR CONDUCT.

The service of God is justly called a "reasonable service"—

But a fruitless profession is most unreasonable—

No reason can be assigned "why" persons should rest in such a state.

1. Is not a conformity to Christ's precepts practicable?

Many allege that such strictness as he requires is unattainable—

We allow that absolute perfection is not to be expected in this world—

But an unreserved devotedness of ourselves to God is attainable—

Thousands of the saints of old have walked thus with God—

There is a cloud of living witnesses who exemplify this conduct—

God has promised grace to all who seek it diligently—

2. Is not obedience to him necessary?

We may be good citizens if we possess only the virtues of heathens.—

But an unfeigned regard to Christ is necessary to constitute us christians—
St. Paul has fully declared the inefficacy of outward religion—Rom. ii. 28, 29.

Judas and the foolish virgins awfully exemplified it—Matt. xxv. 3, 11, 12.

Our Lord has warned us all respecting it—Matt. vii. 21—23.

3. Will not a feigned allegiance be discovered by him?

We may easily deceive our fellow-creatures—

But every motion of our hearts is visible to Christ—Heb. iv. 13.

Nor can the most specious appearances deceive him—John ii. 24, 25.

In his final judgment he will shew that he was privy to our most secret thoughts and desires—1 Cor. iv. 5.

4. Shall we not wish at last that we had been sincere and upright?

The reproach which attends the exercise of real religion, may make us satisfied with the form of it at present—

But in the day of judgment we shall see our folly—Wisd. v. 1—9.

We shall not know what to reply to this question then—

The vain excuse we now make we shall not even dare to offer—

APPLICATION.

Let all then seek to become christians indeed—

Let us not be afraid to confess our Lord before men—

But let our lives be consistent with our professions—

Let us trust in the Lord as simply as if obedience were *not* required—

Let us obey the Lord as zealously as if obedience *only* were required—

THE EVIL AND DANGER OF BACKSLIDING.

Hos. iv. 16. Israel slideth back, as a backsliding heifer. (H. H.)

SUCH is the influence of bad example, that it is extremely difficult to withstand its attractions, even at the time that we behold its fatal effects. Israel, or the ten tribes, from their first apostacy under Jeroboam, were irreclaimably addicted to idolatry. The prophet finding his efforts vain with respect to them, turns to Judah, and intreats that they would not tread in the steps of Israel,* who, like an untamed and refractory bullock, had entirely cast off the yoke, and refused all subjection to Jehovah.

Humiliating as this account of Israel is, it is but too just a representation of the christian world, whose conduct is utterly unworthy of the name they bear, and from whose ways we cannot stand at too great a distance.

To impress this awful truth upon your minds, we propose to shew,

I. WHEN WE MAY BE SAID TO RESEMBLE A BACKSLIDING HEIFER—

We owe submission to our heavenly Master; but give too much reason for the comparison in the text. This resemblance may be seen in us

1. When we will not draw in God's yoke at all—

Unconverted men in every age and place are rebels against God, Exod. v. 2. Ps. xii. 4. Jer. ii. 31, & vii. 24; and, though all are not equally

* Ver 15. At Gilgal and at Bethel, where God had formerly been worshipped, idols were now set up. The prophet, exhorting Judah not to go to those places, calls Beth-el, (the house of God,) Beth-aven, (the house of vanity.)

profligate in their manners, all are equally averse to spiritual employments: the law of God is considered as imposing on them an intolerable yoke, to which they will not, they cannot submit. Rom. viii. 7. They are indeed subjected to it against their will; but neither chastisements nor encouragements can prevail upon them to draw in it: on the contrary, like a ferocious bullock, they are insensible of favors, and they fret at rebukes. Jer. xxxi. 18.

2. When we draw in it only by fits and starts—

Many appear willing to obey God in a time of sickness, Isa. xxvi. 16, or after some signal deliverance, Ps. cvi. 12, 13, or under an impressive sermon, Exod. xxiv. 3, 7, Jam. i. 24, or during a season of peace and tranquillity: Matt. xiii. 21: but, as soon as ever the particular occasion that called forth their pious resolutions has ceased, or they find that they must suffer for Christ's sake, they forget the vows that are upon them, and return to their former state of carelessness and indifference. Ps. lxxviii. 34—37. They renew their resolutions perhaps at certain seasons; but “their goodness is as the morning dew, or as the early cloud that passeth away.” Thus, like a heifer that will draw for one moment and will not the next, they are, in the strongest sense of the words, unprofitable servants.

3. When we grow weary of the yoke—

It is not uncommon for persons to go on well for a season, and yet draw back at last. They grow weary of *performing their duties*, of *exercising their graces*, of *mortifying their lusts*. If they maintain an observance of public duties, they become remiss in those of the family and the closet: their delight in the scriptures languishes; their meditations are cold; their devotions formal. Their faith, their hope, their love operate with less vital energy: and their besetting sins, whatever they were, regain their strength, and resume their ascendancy. These are like a horse or bullock, which, after having yielded to the yoke for a season, becomes restive and ungovernable, and disappoints thereby the expectations of its owner.

Lest the frequency of these characters should tempt us to think favorably of them, we proceed to shew,

II. THE EVIL AND DANGER OF SUCH A STATE—

We shall notice,

1. The evil of it—

A backslidden state, in whomsoever it is found, is exceeding sinful; but in those who have made some profession of religion, it is attended with peculiar aggravations.

It is a contemning of God; of his Majesty, which demands our subjection, and of his mercy, which would accept and reward our poor services. And it is in this light that God himself frequently complains of it. Numb. xi. 20; 1 Sam. ii. 30, and 2 Sam. xii. 10; Ps. x. 13.

It is a justifying of the wicked; for it says to them, in fact, “I was once as you are, and thought I should become happier by serving God: but I find by experience that there is no profit in serving him; and therefore I am returning to your state, which is, on the whole, the happier and more desirable.”

It is a discouraging of the weak. Little do false professors think how much evil they do in this way. Mal. ii. 8. Many are induced to follow their example in some things, under the idea that they are innocent; and are thus drawn from one sin to another, till they make shipwreck of a good conscience, and utterly turn away from the faith.

And need we multiply words any further to shew the evil of backsliding from God? Well does God himself call it “a wonderful and a horrible thing” Jer. v. 30.

2. The danger of it—

This is an iniquity which God marks with peculiar indignation; Jer. ii 19, 21, 22; and never fails to visit it, sooner or later, with some awful token of his displeasure.

The first symptoms of declension lead, if not speedily mourned over and resisted, to *utter apostacy*. Prov. xiv. 14. The disposition to backslide will soon increase, till it become inveterate, and, unless by a marvellous interposition of God himself, incurable.

The misery that will be incurred by means of it will far exceed all that have been endured, if no profession of religion had been ever made. “If any man draw back,” says God, “my soul shall have no pleasure in him: he draws back to certain and everlasting perdition:” Heb. x. 38, 39; and “it would have been better for him never to have known the way of righteousness, than, after having known it, to turn back from it.” Matt. xii. 45. 2 Pet. ii. 21.

Let these consequences be duly weighed, and nothing need be added to shew us the importance of “holding fast our profession without wavering.”

To IMPROVE this subject, we shall,

1. Assist you in ascertaining your state before God—

Since all are “bent to backslide” more or less, it is of great importance to inquire of what kind our backslidings are, and to see whether they are merely the infirmities of an upright soul, or the revolt of an apostate. It is indeed difficult to determine this with precision; yet something may be said to aid you in this inquiry.

Examine diligently the *cause*, the *duration*, and the *effects* of your backslidings. Those of the sincere arise from the weakness of their flesh, while yet their spirit is as willing as ever: but those of the hypocrite proceed from a radical disaffection to the ways of God. Those of the sincere continue but a little time, and are an occasion of greater diligence: those of the hypocrite remain, and become the habit of his soul. Those of the sincere humble him in the dust: those of the hypocrite produce a blindness of mind, a seariness of conscience, and a hardness of heart.

But though we thus discriminate for the information of your judgment, we recommend all to stand fast in the Lord, and to guard against the first risings of spiritual decay. Gal. vi. 9.

2. Give a word of counsel to those in different states—

Are you altogether backslidden from God? O return to him, and take upon you his “light and easy yoke!” He invites you with all the tenderness of a father; Jer. iii. 12, 14, 22; he declares himself exceedingly averse to punish you according to your desert; Hos. xi. 7, 8; and he promises to “heal your backslidings, and love you freely.” Hos. xiv. 4.

Are you drawing in his yoke? Bless and adore your God, who has inclined and enabled you to do so. It is his power, and his power alone, that has kept you hitherto: 1 Pet. i. 5; and therefore he must have all the praise. And in order to your continued steadfastness, reflect often on the evil and danger of backsliding; I may add too, on the comfort and benefit of serving God. Surely He is a good Master. Let but your hearts be right with him, and “none of his commandments will appear grievous to you:” 1 John v. 3; on the contrary, you will find that “in keeping his commandments there is great reward,” Ps. xix. 11, and that your labor shall not be in vain with respect to the eternal world. “Be ye faithful unto death, and he will give you a crown of life.” Rev. ii. 10

ADVICE TO BACKSLIDERS.

Rev. iii. 2.—Be watchful, and strengthen the things which remain, that are ready to die.
(S. S.)

THE epistles to the churches of Asia seem descriptive of the state of the several churches at the time they were written—

But they are for the most part applicable also to other churches—

There are too many societies of christians that resemble that at Sardis—

There was much profession and but little life among them—

This our Lord signified to them in the letter he dictated to St. John—
ver. 1.

On account of it he gave them the salutary admonition in the text.

I. WHEN IT MAY BE SAID THAT THE THINGS WHICH REMAIN IN US ARE READY TO DIE.

It is here supposed that there were some good things in the Sardian church, though they were much on the decline—

What is said therefore of their being “dead” must be understood rather in reference to their *frame* than their *state*—

The things which remain in us are ready to die, *when our graces languish*—

The exercise of our graces is a sure test both of the reality and degree of our spiritual life—

We may form a judgment by examining,

Our faith.

The office of faith is to realize invisible things—

When it is vigorous it discovers the comparative value of heaven and earth—

It regards the promises and threatenings of God as certain—

Hence it stimulates the soul to an active pursuit of its chief good—

But many decline in their apprehension of divine things—

They neither see so clearly, nor feel so powerfully the truths of God as they once did—

They consequently relax their diligence in the ways of God—

Such persons are evidently in the state of those at Sardis—

Our hope.

Faith sees the reality, and hope anticipates the enjoyment of heavenly things—

When hope is lively it serves as an anchor of the soul—

It keeps us from fainting under the trials we meet with—

But oftentimes it is suffered to grow dead—

Then the future prospects are less valued—

Earthly things also rise in importance—

We are more discouraged with any difficulties—

We lose our enjoyment of heavenly things—

In this state the things that remain are ready to die—

Our love.

Love is as wings to the believing soul—

It carries us on with ardor and delight—

It makes us entertain low thoughts of all we do—

It excites us to still greater exertions—

But when it decays, we lose our fervor—

Duties become a burden and a task—

They are performed with less frequency and spirituality—
 We endure with less concern the hidings of God's face—
 We are more indifferent respecting his return to our souls—
 What can more strongly indicate the dying state of a soul?—

Moreover, the things which remain are ready to die, *when our corruptions increase.*

Graces and corruptions are as the scales of a balance—
 The growth of corruption argues the decay of the divine life—
 And such decay is manifest,

1. When our besetting sin resumes its ascendancy.

It is the effect of grace to mortify and subdue our besetting sin—
 But that sin is rarely if ever extinguished in this world—
 It is generally the first that discovers our declensions—
 When that regains its power, we are sure that it is ill with the soul—

2. When our natural hardness and obduracy of heart return

Divine grace brings a tenderness of spirit—
 It shews itself by humiliation and contrition—
 But sin will blind the eyes, and harden the heart—

In this state we shall feel less compunction *in or after* the commission of sin—

When conscience thus fails in its office we are in a dying state indeed—

3. When we are unwilling to be reclaimed

A heart duly impressed desires the light—
 But persons in a backslidden state often feel averse to it—
 They are backward to be told of their faults—
 They are ready to palliate and excuse them—

They willingly expose themselves to the temptations of sin—
 This is the worst symptom that a *living* soul can experience—
 May God now accompany with his blessing,

II. OUR LORD'S ADVICE TO PERSONS IN SUCH A STATE.

None can more need advice for their bodies, than these for their souls.

1. Be watchful,

Against self-deception

There are many things which may hide our condition from us—

We may easily mistake gifts for graces—

We may attribute to God's Spirit what results from the operation of *natural* principles—

We may be less sensible of decay because it happens to be gradual—

The heart will suggest many plausible excuses—

It may satisfy itself also with hopes of a speedy revival—

But "be not deceived; God is not mocked"—

Against the occasions of sin.

Many fall by means of their excessive care about worldly business—

Others decline through mixing too much with worldly company—

Too free an use even of lawful things injures many—

But all decay through a neglect of sacred duties—

Be watchful then against occasions of sin—

See the effect which they have produced upon you—

Resist them in future on their first appearance—Prov. iv. 14, 15.

2. Strengthen the things that remain.

Go to Christ for his Spirit.

Christ is the only source of spiritual strength*

In vain will be all human endeavors without his aid—

Go then, and plead with him that promise—Jer. iii. 22.

“They that dwell under his shadow shall return,” &c.—Hos. xiv. 7.

Exercise your graces more diligently.

Every thing improves by exercise—

Put forth therefore your faith, your hope, your love—

“Stir up the gift of God that is in you”—

You will then experience the truth of that promise—2 Pet. i. 10. 11.

Lay home upon your heart the most powerful considerations.

Think how uncomfortable a declining state is; how dishonorable to God, and dangerous to your own souls!

Consider that if God ever restore you, he may do it in such a way as shall be extremely terrible and distressing—

But what if he should “come at an unexpected hour?”—

Let instant attention then be paid to the direction following the text—
Rev. iii. 3.

ADDRESS,

1. To those who have no marks of life in them.

They who are in a declining state are in great danger—

If they be not restored “their last state will be worse than their beginning”—

What danger then must they be in who exercise no graces, and indulge numberless corruptions!—

Oh! repent, ere it be too late—

2. To those who are enjoying the divine life.

“Be not high-minded, but fear,” and be watchful—

“Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling”—

If it be difficult to proceed, it is still more so to recover lost ground—

Remember your strength consists in depending upon Christ—

When you are weak in yourselves then only are you truly strong—

Comfort yourselves with that description of your almighty Guardian—
Jude 24.

ON EATING AND DRINKING OUR OWN DAMNATION.

1 Cor. xi. 27, 29.—Whosoever shall eat this bread, and drink this cup of the Lord unworthily, shall be guilty of the body and blood of the Lord. . . . For he that eateth and drinketh unworthily, eateth and drinketh damnation to himself, not discerning the Lord's body. (S. S.)

THE more excellent any thing is, the greater is the guilt contracted by the abuse of it—

A contempt of the law is not so bad as a contempt of the gospel—Heb. x. 28, 29

An irreverent attendance on divine ordinances is exceedingly sinful—

But to profane the Lord's supper is worse, inasmuch as that institution is more solemn and brings us nearer to God—

*Rev. iii. 1. “He hath the seven spirits of God,” i. e. a fulness of all the gifts and graces of the Spirit, with a power to dispense them in all their perfection and variety.

Hence when St. Paul reprov'd the former, he spake mildly—1 Cor. xiv 33, 40.

But when he reprov'd the latter, he spake with great severity—

I. WHAT IT IS TO EAT THE BREAD, AND DRINK THE CUP OF THE LORD UNWORTHILY.

To understand this, we should enquire how the Corinthians behaved—*

The abuses of which they were guilty are impracticable now—

Nevertheless we may imitate them in our spirit and temper—

Like them we shall eat and drink unworthily if we do it,

1. Ignorantly.

The Corinthians did not discriminate between the common and religious use of the consecrated elements—

Many at this time also partake without discerning the Lord's body—

They, not remembering his death, defeat the end for which the sacrament was instituted—

2. Irreverently.

The customs of our country do not admit of our meeting in the tumultuous way that was practiced at Corinth—1 Cor. xi. 21.

But many are altogether as destitute of reverence and sacred awe—

A light, worldly, impenitent heart is unbecoming that solemnity—

Such a frame, if habitual, makes us partake unworthily—

3. Uncharitably.

The rich did not impart of their provisions to the poor—1 Cor. xi. 22.

We also may be equally destitute of christian love—

We may be haughty, injurious, unforgiving, &c.—

Such a frame wholly unfits us for the Lord's table—Matt. v. 23, 24

4. Sensually.

The Corinthians made it an occasion for intemperance and excess—

Though we cannot imitate them in this, we may be as carnal as they—

A want of spirituality and affiance in Christ makes our service carnal—

Nor can such a service be acceptable to Him who will be worshipped in spirit and in truth—

To attend at the Lord's table in such a manner is no slight or venial offense.

II. THE CONSEQUENCE OF SO DOING.

The consequences mentioned in the text respect,

1. The guilt we contract.

They were "guilty of the body and blood of our Lord" who crucified him, as are they also who apostatize from his truth, Heb. vi. 6.

They too are involved in the same guilt who partake unworthily of the Lord's supper—

They manifest a contempt of this sacrifice, Heb. x. 29.

What dreadful iniquity is this!—

How carefully should we abstain from the commission of it!—

2. The punishment we incur.

The word "damnation" imports *temporal judgment*†—

Eternal damnation is by no means a necessary consequence of this sin, Matt. xii. 31.

* Ver. 20—22.—Their conduct seems at first sight to be absolutely inconsistent with a profession of christianity. But, having been accustomed to such behaviour in their feasts during their Gentile state, they were as yet too much addicted to their former habits.

† The apostle explains his meaning in the following verse; "for, for this cause," &c. and he tells us that it was a chastisement inflicted to keep them from eternal condemnation, ver. 32.

Yet if it be unrepented of, no doubt this punishment will follow—

And we may expect some spiritual or temporal judgments for it *here*—

We should therefore examine ourselves well before we attend the table of the Lord, ver. 28.

ADDRESS,

1. Those who urge this as an excuse for neglecting the Lord's supper.

There are many who under this pretext cover their own unwillingness to yield themselves up to God—

But God will not admit their vain excuses—

The habitual neglect of their duty insures the punishment which they desire to avoid—

Let all then devote themselves to the Lord in the use of all his instituted ordinances—

2. Those who are really kept away by a fear of incurring this punishment.

Many are kept from the table by a sense of their own unworthiness—

But to be unworthy, and to partake unworthily, are very different things*—

Yet if we have partaken unworthily in past times, let us humble ourselves for it; and then may we come again with joy—

This has been the experience of many, 2 Chron. xxx. 15—23, and may be ours also.

THE CONSEQUENCES OF NEGLECTING PRAYER.

Isai. lxi. 7. There is none that called upon thy name, that stirreth up himself to take hold of thee: for thou hast hid thy face from us. (S. S.)

MAN is encompassed with dangers from which no human foresight can deliver him—

He is oppressed with wants which no creature can supply—

It is to God that he must look for the blessings which he needs—

But he is naturally so averse to prayer, that he will bear all his own burdens rather than apply to God for relief—

On this account it is that so many faint under their afflictions—

And this was the ground of God's controversy with his people,

I. THE NATURE OF PRAYER.

Prayer is represented in the scriptures by a variety of expressions—

It is here set forth under the idea of "calling upon God."

Petitions, either with or without a form, are not worthy the name of prayer, if they be unattended with a devout spirit—

Prayer is a work of the heart rather than of the lips—

It supposes that we feel our wants, desire to have them supplied, and believe that God is able and willing to relieve them—

It is also described as a "taking hold of God."

* A rebel against a mild and merciful prince is unworthy of pardon: but if he receive with gratitude the pardon offered him, and return to his allegiance, he receives it *worthily*. Thus we are *unworthy* of the smallest mercies, and much more of the children's bread: but if we receive this bread with humility, gratitude, and an increasing devotedness of heart to God, we receive it as we ought, that is, *worthily*.

God has set himself, as it were, before us in the promises—

There we may lay hold on him by faith—

We may address him as the patriarch of old—Gen. xxxii. 26.

And this is the mean prescribed by God for the obtaining of his blessings

—Isai xxvii. 5.

It is further called a “stirring up of oneself” to lay hold on God.

It is no easy thing to gain access to God in prayer—

We engage in it for the most part with much reluctance—

Our thoughts wander, ere we are aware, and in spite of our endeavors to fix them—

We seem to lose the accustomed energy of our minds—

We need again and again to stir up our sluggish hearts—

When we consider the duty in this light, we shall see reason to lament,

II. THE GENERAL NEGLECT OF IT.

Many live entirely without prayer.

They are wholly occupied with worldly concerns—

They are not sensible of any *spiritual* wants—

They rely on their own industry for *temporal* advancement—

They acknowledge not before God either their sins or their necessities—

Others only occasionally lift up their hearts to heaven.

They will cry under the pressure of some heavy affliction—Isai xxvi. 16.

But they resemble those spoken of by the prophet—Hos. vii. 14.

Like metal from the fire they soon return to their former hardness—Ps. lxxviii. 34—37.

After some signal deliverance too they will praise God—

But, like the Israelites, they will soon forget his mercies—Ps. cvi. 11—13.

Some will maintain with constancy an external regard to this duty—

They will repeat their accustomed form at stated seasons—

Or they will offer a few general and cold petitions—

And with this outward act they will rest satisfied—

They feel no pleasure in the duty, but perform it as a task—

But there are few indeed who pray to God aright.

There is a remnant now, as there was in the prophet's days*—

There are some who “stir up their souls to lay hold on God”—

But these are few when compared with the bulk of mankind—

They may be said comparatively to be “none” at all—

To counteract this evil we proceed to set forth,

III. THE CONSEQUENCES OF THIS NEGLECT.

The tokens of God's displeasure, which those in the text experienced, will be experienced by all who neglect prayer—

God will surely “hide his face from them.”

He will not reveal to them his glory.

He reveals himself to his people as he does not unto the world—John xiv. 22.

He shines into their hearts to discover to them his glory—

But he will vouchsafe no such mercy to those who call not upon him—

His perfections are to them rather an object of terror than of admiration—

He will not manifest to them his love.

He often “sheds abroad his love in the hearts” of those who seek him—

But the neglecters of prayer “intermeddle not with their joy”—Prov xiv. 10.

* Isai. viii. 18. The prophet certainly did not mean to include them in his censure.

They are strangers to the Spirit of adoption—
 They rather banish God from their thoughts, and wish like the fool*—
 He will not communicate to them his blessings.
 His faithful worshippers have all the blessings of grace and glory—
 But others have no part or lot with them—
 The blessings they do enjoy are turned into a curse unto them—
 And to eternity must they ascribe their misery to their own neglect

APPLICATION.

They, who live without prayer, should consider these things,
 This offense has been awfully marked by the indignation of God†—
 How bitter must be the reflections of those who perish through this neglect!—

Surely all should seek the Lord while he *may* be found—
 They also, who are formal in prayer, should lay them to heart.
 These, as being more liable to deceive themselves, are in greater danger—
 Our prayers must be fervent in order to be effectual—James v. 16.
 If we would enter into heaven, we must press into it with violence—Matt.

xi. 12.

Nor should this subject ever be forgotten by those who profess godliness.
 Unless we stir up ourselves continually, we shall soon lose the divine presence—

We cannot guard too much against formality in prayer—
 Let us be encouraged by God's gracious declaration ||—

MEN'S PROUD CONTEMPT OF GOD.

Psalm, x. 4, 5.—The wicked, through the pride of his countenance, will not seek after God. God is not in all his thoughts: his ways are always grievous: thy judgments are far above out of his sight: as for all his enemies, he puffeth at them. (S. S.)

PRIDE, when manifested in a flagrant manner, universally excites disgust; so hateful is it, when divested of the specious garb in which it is generally clothed. But though all hate pride, when it appears in others, few are sensible how much it reigns within their own bosoms. In our converse with man, this evil disposition is ready to shew itself on every occasion: but in our conduct towards God, it is the fruitful parent of habitual neglect, and atheistical contempt. This is affirmed in the passage before us, in which we may notice,

I. THE STATE OF THE WICKED.

It is not easy to conceive a more humiliating description of their character than that given us by the Psalmist:

They "will not seek after God."

* Ps. xiv. 1. The words in Italics are not in the original.

† If all the souls that are banished from the divine presence were asked, "Wherefore has God hid his face from you?" they must assign the reason that is given in the text.

‡ Ps. lxxxi. 10—12. "God gave them up:" to what? to their enemies? to death? or to immediate and eternal condemnation? No; to what was worse than even that, "their own hearts lust," that they might "treasure up wrath against the day of wrath."

|| Prov. xv. 8. God is not more pleased with the songs of angels than with the sighs and groans of a contrite soul.

God invites them to seek his face, and promises that he will be found of them; but they cannot be prevailed upon either by promises or threats: they will seek with eagerness an earthly object, that may make them happy; but they account God unworthy of any notice or regard, Job xxxv. 10.

"He is not even admitted into their thoughts."

It is astonishing to what a degree men often banish God from their minds. They will pass days, months, and even years, without one reverential thought of him, unless when they are alarmed by some awful providence, or awakened by some faithful discourse: and *then*, unless the grace of God prevent them, they will cast him out of their minds again as soon as possible, and drown their thoughts in business or dissipation, Job xxi. 14, 15.

"They account 'his ways,' as far as they know them, 'grievous.'"

When urged to devote themselves to God in sincerity and truth, they conceive that such a state is unattainable, or, at least, incompatible with the common duties and offices of life. They call the indulgence of their lusts, liberty; and the exercise of vital godliness, an intolerable bondage. Every part of the divine life is irksome to them, and *that* too, not occasionally, but "always," without any change or intermission.

The "judgments of God are far above out of their sight."

By the "judgments" of God we understand his word and works. Now these are not only out of their sight in some particulars (for they are incomprehensible in some respects even to the most enlightened saints) but they are altogether foolishness unto them, 1 Cor. ii. 14. When the mysteries of redemption are opened, they are esteemed by them as "cunningly devised fables:" and when the marvellous interpositions of Providence are insisted on, they are ready to exclaim, with Ezekiel's hearers, "Ah! Lord God, doth he not speak parables?" Ezek. xx. 49.

"As for all their enemies, they puff at them."

If God himself threaten them as an enemy, they disregard his menaces. The denunciations of his wrath are deemed by them unworthy of any serious attention. They even puff at them with contempt and disdain. They quiet all their fears, saying, like them of old, "Tush, God shall not see; neither will the Almighty regard it:" Ps. xciv. 7. "I shall have peace, though I walk in the imagination of my heart," Deut. xxix. 19.

In order to account for this state of things, let us trace it to,

II. THE REAL SOURCE OF THEIR WICKEDNESS.

We might trace this practical atheism to men's ignorance and unbelief: but the Psalmist suggests to us the original ground and occasion of it: it all arises from the pride of their hearts.

Men are *too good*, in their own apprehension, to need God's mercy.

They will confess that they are not altogether so good as they might be; but they do not think they deserve God's wrath and indignation. Why then should they trouble themselves to ask for mercy at his hands, when they are in no danger of suffering his judgments?

They are also *too strong* to need his aid.

They imagine, that they can repent when they please, and that, whensoever they resolve, they can easily carry their resolutions into effect. If they thought that "without God they could do nothing," and that "he must give them both to will and to do," then there were reason for imploring his assistance: but, when they acknowledge no such dependence upon God, wherefore should they seek his aid?

Moreover, they are *too wise* to need the teachings of his Spirit.

They see perhaps their need of a revelation to discover to them the mind

and will of God; but, when that is once given, they are not conscious that they need a spiritual illumination to discover the truths contained in it. They suppose their reason to be as sufficient for the investigation of spiritual, as of carnal things: and under that persuasion, they consider all application to God for the teachings of his Spirit, as enthusiastic and absurd.

Finally, they are *too happy to need the divine presence*.

They are occupied with carnal pleasure, and wish for nothing beyond it. If only they can have the undisturbed indulgence of their appetites, it is, to them, all the paradise they desire. As for the light of God's countenance, and the manifestations of his love, they know not what is meant by such things; they suppose that they exist only in the pretensions of hypocrites, and the conceits of fanatics.

In short, like those of Laodicea, they possess such an imaginary sufficiency within themselves, that they have no need of God at all, Rev. iii. 17. And hence it is that they care not to have God in all their thoughts.

INFER,

1. How astonishing is the depravity of human nature!

If all be not equally addicted to gross sins, all are equally "without God in the world," Eph. ii. 12: all have a "carnal mind that is enmity against God," Rom. viii. 7. Alas! What a picture of human nature! Let "every mouth then be stopped, and all the world become guilty before God," Rom. iii. 10, 11, 12, 19.

2. How great is the change that takes place in conversion!

The state of a converted soul forms a perfect contrast with that of the wicked. "Old things pass away, and all things become new." Let all then ask themselves, Am I now devoting myself to God, as once I did to the world; and despising the world, as once I despised God? 'This were indeed "a new creation," 2 Cor. v. 17.

3. How necessary is conversion in order to an enjoyment of heaven!

There must be within ourselves a meetness for heaven before we can enjoy it, Col. i. 12. Let not those then, who banish God from their thoughts, and cast off his yoke, suppose that they could be happy in heaven, even if they were admitted there. If they would delight themselves in God for ever, they must obtain in this world a conformity to his image, and a delight in his commandments.

THE CERTAINTY THAT SIN WILL FIND US OUT.

Numb. xxxii. 23.—Behold ye have sinned against the Lord: and be sure your sin will find you out. (S. S.)

THE fear of punishment, if not the best, is certainly the most common preservative from sin—

Under the Mosaic dispensation it was the principal motive with which the divine commands were enforced—

Nor did St. Paul, though so well acquainted with the liberal spirit of the gospel, think it wrong to "persuade men by the terrors of the Lord"—

The words before us, therefore may, not improperly, be addressed to us*—
We may take occasion from them to consider,

I. IN WHAT MANNER WE HAVE SINNED AGAINST THE LORD

It would be endless to attempt an enumeration of all the sins we have committed—

We shall confine ourselves to that view of them which the context suggests.

The sin against which Moses cautioned the two tribes was, unfaithfulness to their engagements—

And, a preferring of their present ease to the executing of the work which God had assigned them—

Now we promised at our baptism to renounce the world, the flesh, and the devil—†

These promises *then* made for us, we have renewed at our confirmation and at the Lord's table—

But how have we kept the covenant which we have thus solemnly entered into?—

Have we not maintained that friendship with the world which is enmity with God? James iv. 4.

Have we not rather sought to please than to mortify our carnal appetites? Tit. iii. 3.

Has not the god of this world led us captive at his will? Eph. ii. 2. 2 Tim. ii. 26.

And is not such a life one continued violation of our baptismal engagements?—

But the sin referred to in the text, will scarcely bear any comparison with ours.

The Israelites were to maintain a warfare with men; we with the devil, Eph. vi. 12.

They were to fight for an earthly portion; we, an heavenly, 1 Cor. ix. 25.

They might have urged that *their* aid was unnecessary, when *God* was engaged—

And that, after all, the prize was an inadequate reward for such fatigue and danger—

But, can we hope to conquer without exerting our own powers?—

Do we suppose that God will subdue our enemies without our concurrence?—

Or can we say that the prize held forth to us is not worth the contest?—

If our engagements be more solemn, our work more noble, and our reward more glorious than theirs, our sin in disregarding all must be proportionably greater—

Yet who amongst us must not confess that he has forgotten all his vows?—

Behold then, we may say to all, “Ye have sinned against the Lord”—

Nor are we to suppose that our sin will always pass unnoticed.

*The tribes of Reuben and Gad had solicited permission to have the land of Jazer and of Gilead for their portion instead of any inheritance in the land of Canaan. Upon their promising to fight in conjunction with the other tribes until the whole of Canaan should be subdued, Moses acceded to the proposal; but warned them withal, that if they receded from their engagement, they should assuredly meet with a due recompense from God.

†See the Church Catechism.

II. WHAT ASSURANCE WE HAVE THAT OUR SIN SHALL FIND US OUT.

Sin may be said to find us out when it brings down the divine judgments upon us.

Conscience, stupified or seared, often forgets to execute its office—

Nor speaks, till God, by his Providence or Grace, awaken it—

Sometimes years elapse before it reproves our iniquities—Gen. xlii. 21, 22

Sometimes it testifies to our face as soon as our sin is committed—Matt. xxvi. 74, 75, and xxvii. 3, 4.

Whenever it thus condemns us, our sins may be said to find us out—

But the expression in the text imports rather the visitation of God for sin—

There is a punishment annexed to every violation of God's law—Ezek. xviii. 4.

And sin then finds us out effectually when it brings that punishment upon us—

That it will find us out, we have the fullest possible assurance.

The perfections of God's nature absolutely preclude all hope of impunity.

If he be omnipresent, he must see; if omniscient, remember; if holy, hate; and if just, punish the violations of his law—

If he be possessed of veracity and power, he must execute the judgments he has denounced—

The declarations of his Word abundantly confirm this awful truth—Isa. iii. 11. Rom. ii. 9; Ps. xxi. 8; Prov. xi. 21.

Sin leaves a track which can never be effaced; and evil, however slow-paced, will surely overtake it—Prov. xiii. 21; Ps. cxl. 11.

However scoffers may exult in their security, their ruin is fast approaching—2 Pet. ii. 3, and iii. 4, 9, and Dent. xxix. 19, 20.

The remarkable instances of sin being detected and punished in this world afford a strong additional testimony—

David and Gehazi, though so studious to conceal their guilt, had their iniquity marked in the punishment inflicted for it—2 Sam. xii. 9—12; 2 Kings v. 26, 27.

When according to human calculations, it was above two millions to one that Achan would escape, the lot fell on him by an infallible direction—Josh. vii. 14—18.

How much more then shall the most hidden things be brought to light hereafter!—

The appointment of a day of final retribution puts the matter beyond a possibility of doubt—

For what end can there be such a period fixed but that the actions of men may be judged—

And for what end can they be judged, but that every man may receive according to his deeds—Eccl. xii. 14.

We may then emphatically say to every sinner, "*Be sure, &c.*"—

INFER,

1. How earnest should we be in searching out our own sins!

We think little of evils which have been committed by us long ago—

And imagine that they are effaced from God's memory as well as from our own—

But every action, word and thought is noted in the book of his remembrance—

He sees the transaction of former years as if they had this moment passed—

All our iniquities are viewed by him in one accumulated mass—
Nor does he abhor them less than in the very instant they were committed—

Let us not then pass them over, or palliate them, as youthful follies—

Let us remember how exactly the Lord's threatenings were executed on the Israelites in the wilderness—Numb. xxxii. 10—13.

And endeavor to avert his judgments while space for repentance is allowed us—

Let us mourn over our innumerable violations of our baptismal covenant—

Let us lament our solicitude about a present portion, our aversion to fight the Lord's battles, and our indifference about the heavenly Canaan—

We must repent of these things, or lie under the guilt of them for ever—
Ps. l. 21 ; Luke xiii. 3.

2. How thankful should we be that a way of escape is provided for us !

It is not sin lamented, but sin unrepented of, which will find us out—

There is a city of refuge provided for those who will flee to it—Heb. vi. 18.

The man, Christ Jesus, is an hiding-place from the impending storm—
Isa. xxxii. 2.

If we flee to him, we may be sure that sin shall not find us out—

Every perfection of the Deity is pledged to save a believing penitent—
1 John i. 9.

We are confirmed in this hope by the most *positive declarations of scripture*—Isa. xlv. 22 ; Mic. vii. 19 ; Heb. viii. 12.

We have most *authentic and astonishing instances* of sin forgiven—
2 Sam. xii. 13 ; Luke vii. 47, and xxiii. 43.

And *the day of judgment* is appointed no less for the complete justification of believers than for the condemnation of unbelievers—2 Thess. i. 9, 10.

Let this blessed assurance then dwell richly on our minds—

Let it encourage us to take refuge under the Saviour's wings—Matt. xxiii. 37.

Let an holy confidence inspire those who have committed their souls to him—2 Tim. i. 12.

And let all rejoice and glory in him as able to save them to the uttermost—
Heb. vii. 25.

THE SIN OF MAKING LIGHT OF CHRIST.

Matt. xxii. 5.—But they made light of it. (S. S.)

WE are apt to condemn the Jews as blind and obstinate, because they rejected Christ in spite of the clearest evidence in his favor—but we ourselves are more guilty than they, because we enjoy much greater advantages for understanding the gospel than they did, and yet are as regardless of it as they were.

Our blessed Lord illustrated their conduct by a marriage-feast, to which they who were invited, refused to come. The same invitation is sent to us ; and we, no less than they, “make light of it”

To bring home a conviction of this upon our minds, we shall shew,

I. WHAT ARE THE BLESSINGS WHICH WE ARE INVITED TO PARTAKE OF
God is here represented as having made a marriage for his Son.

The figure of a marriage union is often used to represent the connection that subsists between Christ and his church—Jer. iii 14; Hos. ii. 19, 20. He is the bridegroom, and the church is his bride—Isa. liv. 5; Rev. xxi. 9. And the connexion is then formed, when the church gives up herself to Christ as her head and Lord, and by faith becomes so united to him as to be one flesh, Eph. v. 30—32, or to speak more properly, “one spirit with him”—1 Cor. vi. 17.

The feast prepared on the occasion contains all the blessings of grace and glory.

There is nothing that can nourish or delight the soul which God has not prepared for the bride on her union with Christ—Isa. xxv. 6. She instantly becomes related to him, and is considered in all things as his daughter, an object of his affections, and a partaker of his inheritance.—Let any one enquire, What is there that my soul can desire in time or eternity? and he shall find it all set before him, that he may freely and richly enjoy it.—

To a participation of this feast we are sent to invite you.

In one view, they to whom we are sent, are the bride; but in another view, they are the guests.—The commission God has given to his servants is to “go out into the highways and hedges, and to bring in as many as they can find.”—To you therefore we come, declaring that no unworthiness on your parts shall exclude you, provided you put on the wedding garment, which the Master of the feast has prepared for you.—Accept the invitation; and all the blessings of salvation shall be yours.—Pardon, peace, strength, and whatever else can comfort the weary, and support the weak, shall become the daily, the everlasting food of your souls.—

To evince how much our message is disregarded, we proceed to shew,

II. WHO ARE THEY THAT MAKE LIGHT OF THE INVITATION.

Among the numberless classes that might be mentioned, two only shall be selected;

1. They who satisfy themselves with excuses for declining it.

The persons, mentioned in the context, excused themselves on account of “their farms or merchandize.”—But their pleas, however satisfactory in their own eyes, were not admitted by God.—On the contrary, he declared them to be “unworthy ever to taste of his supper.”—Now what excuses has any man more urgent than these?—And if these were of no avail in their case, what right have we to think, that the plea of worldly business will be admitted in our favor?—If the prosecuting of our worldly business were really incompatible with the enjoyment of God, there can be no doubt which we ought to prefer—He was “a wise merchant, who having found a pearl of great price, sold all that he had and bought it.”—But our duties to God and to the world are by no means irreconcilable with each other.—And therefore the resting in such vain excuses shews, that we make light of the salvation offered us—

2. They who do not accept it with all thankfulness.

Blessings, like those set before us in the gospel, ought to be regarded as of the first importance.—Indifference towards them is a positive contempt of them.—If a slave, whom we had ransomed at a great price, and to whom we offered liberty, and affluence, and honor, should express no gratitude, no joy on the occasion, should we not think that he “made light of” our proffered kindness?—But what bondage is so dreadful as that in which we are

held by sin and satan? or what liberty is like that of God's children? or what comparison is there between the riches and honors of this world, and those which are imparted to us on our union with Christ?—If then our joy and gratitude excited by the gospel salvation, be not in some measure proportioned to its value and importance, we cannot but be considered as making light of it—

Nor will this be thought a venial matter, if we duly consider,

III. THE FOLLY AND SINFULNESS OF THEIR CONDUCT.

But what words can sufficiently express this? for they make light of,

1. That which is of the greatest possible value.

Estimate the blessings of salvation either *positively* by the price paid for them, or *comparatively* by weighing them, as it were, in a balance against all other things, and then see what it is that they despise.—Only consider, that every one of those blessings was bought with blood, with the blood of God's co-equal, co-eternal Son, a price infinitely exceeding ten thousand worlds.—Is there no guilt, no folly in disregarding things of such inestimable value?—Bring into competition with them all that the world can give; and it will be found lighter than the dust upon the balance, yea, "altogether lighter than vanity itself."—Well therefore does the apostle put that unanswerable question, "How shall ye escape, if ye neglect so *great* salvation?"—Heb. ii. 3.

2. That without which they can never be happy.

The creature, at best, is but as a "broken cistern: in vain shall any one go to it for solid happiness, Jer. ii. 13.—"There is not, there cannot be, any true peace to the wicked," Isa. xlviii. 22.—Let any man try to make himself happy, while the guilt of all his sins continues to lie upon him, and he is in awful suspense about his eternal state; he may be thoughtless as a child, or stupid as a beast; but he cannot be happy.—And if this be the case in the midst of all his gaiety, what will be his situation in a dying hour?—At all events, supposing him ever so happy in life and in death, how will he feel himself on his first entrance into the invisible world?—Will he who made light of the marriage-feast on earth, sit down with boldness at "the marriage supper of the Lamb in heaven?"—Will all those employments to which he was averse in this world, be at once his joy and delight, as soon as he passes into the world above?—If he disregarded earthly things, he would have reason on his side; because he might be happy in God, even though he were destitute of every thing else: but to hope for happiness without God is a desperate delusion; and consequently, to make light of the invitations of the gospel is nothing less than madness itself—

3. That which they are sure to value, when it will be gone beyond recovery.

Here men are of very different sentiments; some accounting godliness the one thing needful, and others despising it as enthusiasm and needless singularity.—But in the eternal world there is no such diversity of opinion: the saints in glory are fully confirmed in the judgment they had formed on earth; and the wicked in hell are fully convinced of their error; the one know by their enjoyments how good it was to obey the heavenly call; and the other know by their sufferings, what "a fearful thing it is to fall into the hands of the living God."—What then is it but madness to make light of that, which we are so sure to value when there remains to us no longer any possibility of attaining it?—Wisd. v. 4.

Let due weight be given to these considerations, and we shall need nothing more to convince us either of the folly or sinfulness of slighting the invitations of the gospel—

APPLICATION.

It is to be feared that, after all, many will persist in their infatuated conduct.—But we would at least make one more effort to reclaim them; and beg of God to render his word effectual to their conversion.—

Know then that the marriage supper is now prepared; and we, as God's servants, come in his name to invite you to it.—We invite you *all*: the rich, the poor; the old, the young; the moral, the immoral.—We announce to you, that all things are ready. Are ye then not ready?—If ye say, “We have not a suitable garment; we declare to you, that the Master of the feast has provided garments for all his guests; and that ye need only to be clothed with the unspotted robe of Christ's righteousness, and ye shall instantly be acceptable in the sight of God.—Put away then your excuses: receive thankfully the invitation sent you: and begin to feast upon those spiritual provisions that shall nourish your souls unto life eternal.—

THE MANIFESTATION WHICH CHRIST HAS GIVEN OF THE FATHER.

John i. 18.—No man hath seen God at any time; the only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, he hath declared him. (S. S.)

THE knowledge of God is the great source of blessings to mankind

But the heathen world were altogether ignorant of him—

Nor were the Jews themselves fully instructed concerning him—

To make a full revelation of him to the world was a part of that work which was reserved for Christ himself—

And this office he performed, to the unspeakable comfort of this church and people—

The evangelist unites his testimony with that of John the Baptist in confirmation of this truth—

We shall enquire,

I. WHAT CHRIST HAS DECLARED OF THE FATHER.

God himself is invisible to the eye of sense—I Tim. vi. 16.

Even Moses was permitted to see only his backparts—Exod. xxxiii. 23.

But Christ had a peculiar relation to the Father as “his only begotten son;” and a most intimate acquaintance with him, as being from all eternity, and at that very hour, “in his bosom”—

He has made known the Father to us, and declared,

1. His nature.

Mankind had gross conceptions of the Deity as a material being—

But Christ has assured us of his perfect *spirituality*—John iv. 24.

Nor was the *Unity* of God clearly ascertained among the Gentiles—

But Christ has left no room for doubt upon this subject—Mark xii. 29.

He has moreover revealed to us a *Trinity* of persons in the Godhead—

He has affirmed in the plainest terms his own Oneness with the Father—John x. 30.

He has spoken of the Holy Ghost as co-existing with himself and with the Father—John xv. 26.

And has joined the Three together as equal in authority and honor—Matt. xxviii. 19.

Thus has he enabled us by faith to “see him who is invisible”—

3. His perfections.

God had long since proclaimed his own name to Moses—Exod. xxxiv. 6, 7.

But Christ has afforded us more abundant discoveries of all his attributes—

He has clearly shewn us that his goodness is unbounded, Matt. v. 45 his sovereignty uncontrolled, Matt. xi. 25, 26, his power irresistible, Matt. xxvi. 53, his justice inflexible, ib. 42, his mercy infinite, John iii. 16, 17, and his truth inviolable—Luke xvi. 17.

There is not any thing relating to his Father, the knowledge of which could be at all serviceable to us, that he has not revealed—John xv. 15

He did not however merely utter these things like the prophets of old.

II. HOW HE DECLARED HIM.

Christ had formerly spoken of God in and by the prophets—1 Pet. i. 11 But now he declared the Father in a different manner.

1. By exhibiting a perfect pattern of him.

He was himself an exact resemblance of the Father—Heb. i. 3.

And in his conduct exhibited every perfection of the Deity—John viii. 29

Hence a sight of him was, in fact, a sight of the Father himself—John xiv. 7—9.

2. By making known his counsels.

Much of the Father's counsels had lain hid from the foundation of the world, or had been very imperfectly revealed—

Christ opened them to his hearers as they were able to bear them—John xvi. 12.

He made known God's intention to admit the Gentiles into his church—Matt. viii. 11, 12.

And assured us that the most abandoned of mankind should be cordially received the very instant he returned to God—Luke xv. 20.

But that none of whatever character could be saved, unless they sought acceptance with God through his mediation—John xiv. 6.

Thus by these declarations he has enabled us to attain a more perfect knowledge of the Father's mind and will—

3. By exerting a secret energy on the minds of men.

No man could know the Father unless Christ revealed him inwardly by his Spirit, as well as outwardly by the world—Matt. xi. 27.

His very disciples understood not until he opened their eyes—Luke xxiv. 45.

Nor can we attain to a true knowledge of God in any other way—

The "word must come to us in power and in the Holy Ghost," or it will come in vain—1 Thess. i. 5.

But when applied by his Spirit, it shall teach us plainly of the Father—John xvi. 25.

INFER,

1. How glorious a person must Christ be.

The description given of him shews his superiority above every created being—

He is not the Son of God by creation, as the angels are, nor by regeneration and adoption, as men; but by an inexplicable generation, his "*only-begotten*"—

And, as well in his incarnate as in his pre-existent state, was continually "in the bosom of the Father"—John iii. 13.

Nor was any other worthy to reveal the Father to us—

Let us then entertain just conceptions of his worth and dignity—

And manifest our delight in him as the saints in heaven did—Rev v. 5—9.

2. How precious ought the scriptures to be to us!

Job and David had but a small portion of the scriptures in their hands—

Yet did they value them above every thing in the world—Job xxviii. 12.
Ps. cxix. 72.

How much more should we, who possess the sacred oracles entire!—

In these is recorded every thing that Christ has declared—

And by these we may be made wise unto salvation—2 Tim. iii. 15.

Let us then search them with diligence, and treasure them up in our hearts—

Nor let a day pass without digging into those invaluable mines—Prov ii. 4.

3 How inexcusable are they who are ignorant of God!

It is to our shame that many of us are still ignorant of God—1 Cor. xv. 34.

We have not that knowledge of him that produces correspondent affections towards him—

But what excuse can we offer in extenuation of our guilt?—

Has not Christ declared the Father in order that we might know him?—

And is he not willing also to reveal him in us by a powerful energy on our souls?—

Some, doubtless, are more guilty than others in proportion as they have possessed means of instruction—

But all will find the consequences of their ignorance most tremendous—2 Thess. i. 8.

Let all begin then to enquire after God with their whole hearts—

Nor rest till they have attained that knowledge of him which is life eternal—John xvii. 3.

CHRIST THE ONLY FOUNDATION.

1 Cor. iii. 11.—Other foundation can no man lay, than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ.
(S. S.)

THERE is not any thing more injurious to the church of God than a party-spirit: yet even in the apostolic age did it begin to distract the Christian community. At Corinth it prevailed, and rose to an alarming height: and St. Paul was obliged to exert all his influence in order to counteract it. He reminded the partisans, that, as "God's building," they should be cemented together with brotherly love: that they should study to shew themselves worthy of the place they held in the church, in expectation of that day when all their works should be tried by fire; and that, instead of fomenting strifes and divisions, they should unite with each other in cleaving stedfastly to the one foundation, whereon they stood.

The declaration in the text is plain, and of infinite importance.

To enter more fully into it we shall consider,

1. WHAT FOUNDATIONS MEN LAY FOR THEMSELVES.

Every man has some foundation for his hope. Though there are many shades of difference in the sentiments of different men, yet their grounds of hope may be reduced to two;

1. Their own goodness.

Some think that nothing but gross sin can expose them to the wrath of God. They therefore congratulate themselves as having never done any thing to merit his displeasure. Others imagine that they may trust in the good works that they have done. They have, in their own apprehension, been regular in their duties to God and man: nor can they conceive that *they* should have reason to fear. Thus, like the Pharisee of old, they thank God that they are not as other men; and are filled with self-complacency, because they are punctual in the observance of certain duties, Luke xviii. 11, 12.

2. Their own works and Christ's merits united.

Many, who see, that their own works cannot justify them according to the strict tenor of the law, yet hope that they will, according to the milder demands of the gospel. If they see that these will not suffice, they will look to Christ to supply their deficiencies. If they see, that such an union is impracticable, and, that Jesus must be their only foundation, they hope, however, that he will save them for their works sake. Thus they either avowedly profess to participate with Christ the honor of their salvation; or, while they pretend to give the honor of it to him, they look for the original and moving cause of it within themselves. Like the Judaising christians, Acts. xv. 5, or the Gentiles whom Peter misled, Gal. ii. 12, 14, they unite the law to Christ; as though Christ needed to have something superadded to him, to render his death effectual. At all events, if they find their error in this respect, they will regard their works as *their warrant* to believe in Christ; and will expect mercy at his hands, not so much because his grace is free and all sufficient, as because they have something in themselves, which may deserve his notice and regard.

These plans of salvation however will be found very erroneous, if we enquire,

II. WHAT IS THAT FOUNDATION WHICH GOD HAS LAID?

Nothing can be more clear, than that he has not laid either of those, which have been before mentioned.

He often describes his people as performing good works: and often promises them, under that character, eternal life. But he always represents us as sinners, and as standing in need of his mercy. And he has sent his Son into the world for that very reason, because none could obtain mercy by any works of their own. Nor has he clearly shewn, that works are *wholly* to be excluded from the office of justifying. He has told us that salvation must be wholly of grace or wholly of works, Rom. xi. 6. That every degree of boasting is excluded from that salvation which he has revealed, Rom. iii. 27; Eph. ii. 8, 9. And that the persons, whom he justifies, are ungodly, and without any works whatever to recommend them, Rom. iv. 5. Christ is the one foundation which he has laid in Zion.

He "has set forth his Son to be a propitiation for sin:" and every sinner is to build his hope on Christ alone. Christ is the foundation laid in the covenant of grace, Gen. xvii. 19; Heb. viii. 6. The same is laid in all the promises, Gen. iii. 15, and xxii. 18; 2 Cor. i. 20. The same was exhibited in all the types.* The same is laid also in the gospel, 1 Pet. ii. 4—6. We are expressly told that there is no other, Acts iv. 12. Nor indeed can there be any other to all eternity.

The necessity of building upon this will appear, while we consider,

* The Paschal Lamb, the Scape Goat, &c.

III. WHY NO OTHER CAN BE LAID.

Many reasons might easily be assigned : but one or two may suffice.

1. Any other would be unworthy of the divine architect.

God himself is the architect, ver. 9 ; and must have all the glory of beginning and perfecting this building. But, if men were to found their hopes on any thing but the Lord Jesus Christ, they would have whereof to glory, Rom. iv. 2. So far as respect was had to any merit in them, so far might they ascribe the honor to themselves. Even in heaven their song must differ from that of the redeemed. Instead of giving *all* the glory to God and to the Lamb, Rev. v. 13, they must take a portion of it to themselves. But this would be utterly unworthy of God to suffer. Indeed he has told us that he never can nor will suffer it, 1 Cor. i. 29, 31 ; Eph. ii. 8, 9. We may be sure therefore that no such way of salvation shall ever be established, as leaves man at liberty to boast. We shall be rewarded *according to our works*, and in some respect *for our works* ; but the only ground of acceptance, either for our persons or our services, is in Christ alone, Eph. i. 6.

2. No other would support the weight that is to be laid upon it.

Whatever our souls need in time or eternity must be derived from that, which is the foundation of our hope. Our pardon must be obtained by it ; our peace flow from it ; our strength and righteousness be given us on account of it ; and eternal glory be bestowed on us, as the reward of it. And can we build our hope of such things in any degree on our own works ? Can we, who, if we had done all that is commanded us, should be only unprofitable servants, imagine, that we can in any respect merit such things, when we have done nothing that is commanded us, at least, nothing perfectly, or as we ought to have done it ? Surely such an hope would soon appear to be a foundation of sand ; and would infallibly disappoint us to our eternal ruin. Yea, the very persons who build on such a foundation, almost invariably deny, that any man can be assured of his acceptance with God ; they account such an assurance to be an enthusiastic delusion ; which is a clear acknowledgment of the insufficiency of *their* foundation to bear this weight.

INFER,

1. How needful is it to enquire what foundation we are upon !

If we build but a common habitation, we are careful on what foundation we raise it. How much more care should we exercise, when we are building for eternity ! Let us enquire, whether we have been deeply convinced of the insufficiency of our own goodness, and of the impossibility of uniting any works of ours with Christ's atoning sacrifice ? And let us examine whether Christ's obedience unto death be our only hope, our only confidence ? We never can be saved unless, with Paul, we utterly renounce the filthy rags of our own righteousness, and desire to be found clad in Christ's unspotted robe, Isa. lxiv. 6 ; Phil. iii. 9.

2. How secure are they who are built upon the Lord Jesus Christ !

Christ, on whom they stand, is justly called "a *tried* stone, and a *sure* foundation," Isa. xxviii. 16. He never yet failed those who trusted in him.

The vilest of mankind have found him able to save them to the uttermost. He is a Rock to those who trust in him ; nor shall the gates of hell prevail against them, Matt. xvi. 18. Let all believers then rejoice in their security ; and hold fast the profession of their faith without wavering, Heb. x. 23.

3. How careful should we be, what superstructure we raise upon him !

While Christ is the foundation of our hope, we are also to build upon him all our works. But our works will all be tried by fire. If they be not

such as tend to his glory, they will be burnt up as hay, and wood, and stubble. If they be truly good, they will stand the trial, like gold, or silver, or precious stones, ver. 11—14. Let us then give diligent heed to our works. We may suffer loss in heaven, though we should not suffer the loss of heaven, ver. 15. Let us then seek “a full reward,” 2 John 8. While we renounce good works *in point of dependence*, let us practice them *from love to our Redeemer*. Thus shall we put to silence our adversaries; and adorn the doctrine of God our Saviour

HATRED OF CHRIST IS HATRED OF THE FATHER.

John xv. 23.—He that hateth me, hateth my Father also. (S. S.)

MEN are ever disposed to palliate their sins, and, by representing them under some specious name, to conceal their real enormity—But God calls every sin by its proper name, and speaks of it with just abhorrence—Covetousness in his eyes is not prudence, but idolatry: Eph. v. 5; a disregard of his presence is not mere inadvertence, but a denial of his most essential attributes: Ps. x. 11, 13; and a contempt of his gospel is not a venial ignorance or inattention, but an absolute hatred both of Christ and of the Father—To confirm this truth we will endeavor to shew,

I. WHO THEY ARE THAT HATE CHRIST.

It may be thought that none but Jews can be guilty of hating Christ, and that the bearing of his name is a sufficient testimony of our regard for him.—But there are too many who, notwithstanding they have been baptized into his name, are yet “enemies to him in their minds.”—Certainly we must number among his enemies,

1. Those who disregard his gospel.

The gospel of Christ ought to be universally received as “glad tidings of great joy.”—But the greater part of mankind feel an aversion to it.—Some dislike its fundamental doctrine of salvation by faith, and represent it as injurious to the interests of morality.—Others hate the duties it enjoins, and traduce it as requiring a state of mind totally incompatible with the discharge of our offices in social and civil life.—Many even of those who approve of the gospel in their judgment, are yet very far from experiencing its power in their souls.—They enjoy not its promises, they fulfil not its precepts, they know not its renovating, sanctifying effects.—It may be asked, Are all these persons haters of Christ? Let Christ himself answer that question.—He states, that a practical renunciation of his authority is a proof, that they are enemies to him in their hearts, and will cause them to be treated as his enemies in the day that he shall judge the world—Luke xix. 14, 27.

2. Those who neglect his ordinances.

Our Lord has promised his peculiar presence to us while we seek him in the ordinances of his own appointment.—Should not then the hope of enjoying his presence endear the ordinances to us, and make us regard them as our most inestimable privilege?—But how are they regarded by the generality amongst us?—Does not worldly business or pleasure often detain us needlessly from the house of God? And when we are assembled for worship, do not our thoughts rove to the very ends of the earth, so that, though

we "draw nigh to God with our lips, our hearts are far from him?"—Are not almost all persons cold and remiss in secret prayer?—And is not family religion either banished altogether, or conducted with such formality as to render it irksome and unprofitable?—Our Lord left it as his dying command that we should often partake of bread and wine in remembrance of his body broken and his blood shed for us—Yet is not his table either shamefully deserted, or else profaned by impenitent, unsanctified communicants?—And what construction must we put on such conduct? Our Lord plainly tells us, that he considers them as his enemies, and that none of those who thus despise his invitations, shall ever taste of his supper—Luke xiv. 18, 24.

3. Those who persecute his people.

Persecution is not carried now to the same extent that it has been in former ages—But has it ceased?—Experience proves that there is the same enmity in the hearts of men against the faithful servants of God as ever there was—There are many at this day who are true descendants of Cain and Ishmael—And, as long as there shall be an unconverted man upon earth, it will be found, that they, who are born after the flesh, will persecute those who are born after the Spirit—Gal. iv. 29. If they do not kill the saints, they will "revile them, and separate them from their company, and say all manner of evil against them falsely for Christ's sake"—And are not such persons enemies to Christ? Yes; he considers himself as the real butt of their malice—Saul thought that he was justly punishing some wild fanatics when he dragged the christians to prison and to death; but Jesus said to him, Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou *me*?—Acts ix. 4. And the prophet tells us that whosoever toucheth the Lord's people, toucheth the apple of his eye—Zech. ii. 8.

The extreme enormity of their conduct appears in this,

II. THAT THE HATRED OF CHRIST IS, IN FACT, A HATRED OF THE FATHER ALSO.

Christ is essentially "one with the Father;" and as "whosoever had seen Christ, had seen the Father," so, "whosoever hateth Christ must of necessity hate the Father also"—But it is evident in other points of view that they hate the Father; for they hate

1. His authority.

God commands all men to believe in his Son, to "kiss him" with holy reverence, and to honor him even as they honor the Father—Ps. ii. 12. John v. 23. But the unequivocal language of those who comply not with his command is, "We will not have this man to reign over us;" "Who is the Lord that we should obey him? we know not the Lord, neither will we obey his voice"—Whatever they may pretend, they are not deceived through unavoidable ignorance, or impelled by irresistible force to reject Christ: they do it from a rooted aversion to the Father himself, and evince by their conduct the truth of that declaration, "The carnal mind is enmity against God; for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be"—Rom. viii. 8, 7.

2. His image.

The word, the ordinances, and the people of God, all bear upon them the impression of God's holiness—And this is the very ground of that aversion which rises against them in the hearts of the ungodly—The gospel is disliked as requiring so much purity and self-denial—The worship of God could be easily tolerated, if an outward form would suffice; but the spirituality and devotion necessary to an acceptable performance of this duty, causes the carnal heart to revolt from it as irksome—If the saints too would counte-

nance the world in its sinful practices, the offense of the cross would cease ; but they "make their light to shine before men;" and on this account they, whose deeds are evil, hate, revile, and persecute them.—Now this clearly proves, that holiness itself is their aversion, and consequently that the image of God, which principally consists in holiness, is hateful to them.—Will any say, it is hypocrisy that they hate, and not holiness? Wherefore then were Christ and his apostles so universally the objects of cruel persecution? Was there any guile in him? Was he not "the brightness of his Father's glory, and the express image of his person?" and walked not his disciples in his steps? It is certain, not only that the image of God is hated by the enemies of Christ, but that every thing that bears his image is hated by them *on that very account*, and *in proportion* as it exhibits a resemblance of him—

3. His very existence.

It is vain indeed to entertain the thought that God could be annihilated—But, if we could suppose for a moment that it were declared from heaven, "There is no God;" would not the tidings excite a general satisfaction?—Would not all the haters of Christ congratulate themselves that there was no God to call them to an account, none to punish them for their iniquities?—Would they not look forward to an unrestrained indulgence of their lusts with pleasure, instead of weeping for the loss of their best and dearest friend?—Yes; as the enemies of Christ exulting in his crucifixion, so would all who hate him rejoice, if the Father also were utterly extinct—That this is no fanciful idea will appear from the declaration of God himself, "The fool hath said in his heart, No God!"—Ps. xiv. 1.

INFER,

1. How desperate is the wickedness of the human heart!

Wherefore is it that men are so full of enmity against Christ and his Father? Is it for having given us his dear Son that they hate the Father; or do they hate Christ for laying down his life for us?—Many good things has he done; for which of them do we reject him?—O let the haters of God blush and be confounded; let them abhor themselves for all their iniquities, and abominations—

2. What a dreadful place must hell be!

Here the wickedness of men is restrained by the preventing grace of God—But in hell it will rage without control—How will all the miserable spirits then vent their malice! How will they gnaw their tongues and blaspheme their God?—Rev. xvi. 9. May *we* never know this by bitter experience—

3. How astonishing is the tender mercy of our God

One would suppose that God should feel nothing but indignation against such an ungrateful world—But behold! he "waiteth to be gracious unto them;" he sends them offers of pardon; he even entreats and "beseeches them to be reconciled to him"—2 Cor. v. 20. O let his goodness lead us to repentance—Let us cast away the weapons of our rebellion, and bow to the sceptre of his grace—So shall we yet be numbered among the friends of God, and be living monuments of his mercy to all eternity.

THE EVILS OF THE TONGUE.

James iii. 6.—The tongue is a fire, a world of iniquity. So is the tongue amongst our members, that it defileth the whole body, and setteth on fire the course of nature; and it is set on fire of hell. (S. S.)

AMONGST the most important of subjects must be reckoned the government of the tongue. The consideration of it is well calculated to convince the profane, to pluck off the mask from hypocrites, to humble the sincere, and to edify every description of persons. St. James, who intended his Epistle as a corrective to the abuse that prevailed in the christian church, insisted strongly upon this subject: and, in the words before us, has given us such a description of the tongue, as; if it had proceeded from any other than an inspired writer, would have been deemed a libel upon human nature. In order that the text may be fully understood, we shall shew,

I. THE TRUE CHARACTER OF THE HUMAN TONGUE.

The Apostle tells us "it is a fire."

Fire, in its original formation, was intended for the good of man; and, when subordinated to his wishes, is highly beneficial: but its tendency is to consume and to destroy. Thus the tongue was at first made for the Creator's praise; but through the introduction of sin, that member, which was, and, if well used, yet is, the glory of man, Ps. lvii. 8, is become "an instrument of unrighteousness" and all iniquity.

Fire also, even the smallest spark, is capable of producing incalculable mischief; such mischief as it may not be in the power of man to repair. Thus also will one single motion of the tongue, ver. 3, 4. It may so irritate and inflame a man, as to change him instantly into a savage beast, or an incarnate devil: and, if the whole world should labor to remedy the evil, it would mock their endeavors.

He further adds, that it is "a world of iniquity."

There is not any sin whatever, which does not stand in the nearest connexion with the tongue, and employ it in its service. Search the long catalogue of sins against God; then inspect those against our neighbor; and, lastly, those against ourselves; and there will not be found one, no, not one, that has not the tongue as its principal ally. See Rom. iii. 13, 14.— — — All iniquities whatever centre in it, and are fulfilled by it: so justly is it called, "A world of iniquity."

Its character will yet further appear by considering,

II. ITS EFFECTS.

1. These are defiling.

Sin, as soon as ever it is conceived in the heart, defiles the soul: but when it is uttered by the lips, "it defileth the whole body." Utterance gives solidity and permanency to that, which before existed in idea, and might have passed away: and, inasmuch as the tongue has every other member at its command to execute, according to their several powers, the things it has divulged, the whole man is become a partaker of its guilt and defilement, Eccl. v. 6; Mark vii. 20—23. And, though all its communications are not equally polluting, yet is there a stain left by means of them, a stain which nothing but the Redeemer's blood can ever wash away.

2. Destructive.

To such an astonishing degree has this fire gained the ascendant, that it has "inflamed the whole course of nature." Look at *individuals*; what malignant passions has it kindled in them! Visit *families*; what animos-

mes, and inextinguishable feuds has it produced! Survey *churches*; and you will find the unhallowed fire burning even in the sanctuary of God;* and sometimes too, even in the very censers of his ministers, alluding to Lev. x. 1. Cast your eyes round upon whole *nations*; and you will perceive that, times without number it has kindled the flames of war, and spread desolation through the globe.†

To prove that this account is not exaggerated, we shall point out,

III. THE REASON OF ITS PRODUCING THESE EFFECTS

'The tongue "itself is set on fire of hell."

Satan is the source and author of all the evils that proceed from the tongue. Does it falsify? behold, it does so at the instigation of that wicked fiend, "the father of lies," Acts v. 3; John viii. 44. Does it discourage men from the prosecution of their duty? It does so, as the devil's agent, Matt. xvi. 23. Does it accuse and scandalize the people of God? Who but satan is the author of such calumnies? Rev. xii. 10. Does it disseminate error? the propagator of that error is satan's minister, however he be transformed into an angel of light, 2 Cor. xi. 3, 13, 14, 15. Does it encourage any bad design? It is the devil himself who speaks by-it, 1 Kings xxii. 21, 22. In every sin that it commits, it is actuated by "the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now worketh in all the children of disobedience, Eph. ii. 2. Its whole "wisdom is earthly, sensual, *devilish*," ver. 15. It comes from hell, and leads to hell: and, if God were to withdraw his restraints here, as he does in hell, it would speedily produce a very hell upon earth.

This alone can account for the effects that proceed from it.

Doubtless the wickedness of the heart may account for much: but, if the flames were not fanned by satannic agency, we can scarcely conceive that they should rage with such an irresistible force, and to such a boundless extent.

INFER,

How great must be the evil of the human heart!

The heart is the fountain, in which "the evil treasure is;" Matt. xii. 35. the tongue is only the channel in which it flows. If the channel then be so vile, what must the fountain be? Yet every one of us has this tongue in his mouth, and this heart in his bosom: and, if God should leave us without restraint, there is not one of us but would proclaim all the evil of his heart, as the most loathsome sensualist, or most daring blasphemer.

2. How much do we need the influences of the Holy Spirit!

It is absolutely impossible for man to tame this unruly member, ver. 7, 8, Yet restrained it must be, if ever we would be saved, James i. 26. What then shall we do? shall we sit down in despair? God forbid. The Holy Spirit will help our infirmities, Rom. viii. 26, and Christ will give us his Spirit if we call upon him. Let us then look to Christ; and we shall prove by sweet experience, that his "grace is sufficient for us," 2 Cor. xii. 9, and that "through him strengthening us we can do all things." Phil. iv. 13.

3. How careful should we be of every word we utter!

Immense injury may we do by one unguarded word. We may take away a character which we can never restore, or inflict a wound which we can never heal. On this account we should "set a watch before the door of our

* By means of heretics, cavillers, and proud disputers, and others who cause divisions and dissensions.

† What has not been perpetrated under the influence of those two words, liberty and equality—

lips," Ps. cxli. 3. Nor is this a matter of expediency merely, but of necessity; for God has warned us that we shall account of every idle word, and, that by our words we shall be justified, and by our words we shall be condemned, Matt. xii. 36, 37, and v. 22, last clause. Let us then be utterly purposed that our mouth shall not offend, Ps. xvii. 3. Let our tongue be as choice silver, or a tree of life, to enrich and comfort the Lord's people, Prov. x. 20, and xv. 4. Let our "speech be always with grace seasoned with salt" for the honor of God, and the good of our fellow creatures, Col. iv. 6; Eph. iv. 29.

THE FOLLY OF VAIN EXCUSES.

Prov. xxiv. 11, 12.—If thou forbear to deliver them that are drawn unto death, and those that are ready to be slain; if thou sayest, Behold, we knew it not; doth not he that pondereth the heart consider it? and he that keepeth thy soul, doth not he know it? And shall not he render to every man according to his works? (H. H.)

OFFICIAL influence is a valuable talent: but to use it aright is often very difficult, and painful to the feelings. Hence those who are possessed of it, are apt to shrink back, when the exercise of it is likely to involve them in much trouble; and they will connive at abuses, which they cannot easily prevent. For such connivance they have excuses ever ready at hand; "They were not aware of the circumstances;" or, "They thought their interposition would be to no purpose." But power and responsibility are inseparable: and the magistrate who neglects his duty, must give an account of such neglect to God, and have his excuses weighed in the balance of the sanctuary. To succor the needy, and to relieve the oppressed, is a sacred duty, which no man can neglect, but at the peril of his soul: and to deceive ourselves with vain excuses is folly in the extreme.

We shall not however limit our views of this subject to magistrates, but shall extend them generally to all those excuses which men make for their neglect of acknowledged duties; and shall consider,

I. THE EXCUSES BY WHICH MEN DECEIVE THEIR OWN SOULS.

None are so hardy as to deny their obligation to serve God: yet the great mass of mankind will plead excuses for their neglect,

1. Of religious duties.

"They have not time to attend to their spiritual concerns." Not time? For what then is their time given them? and what other business have they in comparison of this? But, if they would speak the truth, is not their disregard of religion to be traced rather to their want of inclination to spiritual things——their want of faith in the divine records——their want of all fear of God, and all concern about their souls?——How vain then their plea of want of time, when their neglect arises from a total alienation of their hearts from God!

2. Of moral duties.

The duties of sympathy, of compassion, of activity in succoring the distressed, are mentioned in our text. Now for the neglect of these duties, such as the visiting of the sick, the instructing of the ignorant, the relieving of the needy, and the comforting of the afflicted, men will plead ignorance, inadvertence forgetfulness, inability. But is there not a great degree of

criminality attaching to us, if we do not search out the poor and afflicted, on purpose to alleviate their distresses?— —And is not the true cause of our supineness, that we have no love to our fellow-creatures, no zeal for God, no gratitude for redeeming love?— —It is in vain to think that our neglects are venial under any circumstances, and more especially when they originate in cowardice, and sloth, and selfishness.

Seeing then that such excuses are vain, let us mark,

II. THE FOLLY OF RESTING IN THEM.

Were there no God to call us into judgment, our delusions would be of less consequence: but there is a God by whom all our excuses will be weighed; and he,

1. Will judge with truth.

He looketh not at the outward appearance; "He searcheth the heart and tries the reins," and is privy to the most secret workings of our minds. We may easily deceive ourselves; but him we cannot deceive. See how forcible is the appeal made to us in our text. Can we have any doubt whether he sees our conduct, or forms a correct estimate of it? Let us remember, that "he will bring to light the hidden things of darkness, and make manifest the counsels of the heart;" and that, whatever our judgment be, his will be according to truth.

2. Will award with equity.

Here again the appeal is strong, and carries conviction with it. We are sure that "God will judge the world in righteousness," and "give to every man according to his works." "Whatsoever we have sowed, that shall we also reap: if we have sowed to the flesh, we shall of the flesh reap corruption; but if we have sowed to the Spirit, we shall of the Spirit reap life everlasting."

Let this subject **TEACH** us,

1. To be jealous over ourselves with a godly jealousy.

We are apt to think that conscience is a safe guide, and that we may rest satisfied with its testimony; but conscience is corrupted by the fall, as well as all the other faculties of the soul. It is blinded, bribed, partial, and in many instances "seared as with an hot iron." Hence it is that "every man's way is right in his own eyes." Paul thought he ought to do many things contrary to the name of Jesus; and was applauded by his own conscience, whilst he was sinning against God with all his might. Be not therefore satisfied merely because you feel no condemnation in your own minds; but beg of God to enlighten your conscience, that it may guide you aright, and keep you from those delusions which would involve you in everlasting ruin.

2. To live in daily expectation of the future judgment.

Ask yourselves, not merely, What do I think of this or that conduct; but, What would God say to it, if I were instantly summoned to his tribunal? Such a question as this would often lead you to a very different estimate of yourselves from that which you have formed; and the consideration of his recording every thing in order to a future judgment would tend to keep you vigilant in all your conduct. Walk then as in his sight, and be satisfied with nothing which you are not well assured will satisfy him.

CAUTION AGAINST DECLENSION IN RELIGION.

Matt. xxiv. 12, 13.—Because iniquity shall abound, the love of many shall wax cold: but he that shall endure unto the end, the same shall be saved. (H. H.)

THESE words are a part of the discourse which our Lord held with four of his disciples in private, after he had retired from the temple to the Mount of Olives. Compare Mark xiii. 1—4 with Matt. xxiv. 1, 2. Being in full view of the temple, his disciples were struck with the magnificence of its appearance, and expressed to him their admiration of it: from whence he took occasion to foretell the speedy destruction of it, and to give them signs whereby they should ascertain the approach of the judgments which awaited their whole nation. At the same time he gave them instructions for their own support and comfort under all the trials which they themselves should endure previous to that time. He told them what evil treatment they should meet with from the enemies of his gospel; and what difficulties they should encounter from his pretended friends. Their trials *from without* we considered in another discourse: * those *from within* we propose for our present consideration.

In the words before us our Lord suggests to his disciples,

I. THE DANGER OF SPIRITUAL DECLENSION.

Independent of the proneness of man at all times to backslide from God, there is a danger arising to us from the conduct of those with whom we stand connected. The bitterness of persecution, or abounding of corruption, may operate to abate our zeal in the service of our God; but the falls and offenses of those who profess religion have a peculiar tendency to discourage the people of God; and it is to this, we apprehend, our Lord more especially refers.

Such events must be expected in every age.

If we consult the holy scriptures, we shall find that, even in the apostolic age, multitudes who were once hopeful, declined from the ways of God, and made shipwreck both of faith and of a good conscience, 2 Tim. i. 15, and ii. 17, and iv. 10 — — — And what is there to prevent a recurrence of the same evils? As long as the heart of man is so evil and so treacherous, it will ever be prone to start aside from God, even as a broken bow — — —

Whenever they do happen, they tend to quench the love even of the most established.

Great disappointment is felt by all the members of the christian church: and every one feels a portion of that disgrace which the instability of any member brings upon the whole body. From the frailty of some, the fidelity of others begins to be questioned: evil surmisings arise: a coolness and distance are occasioned among the brethren: the communion of the saints is interrupted; and their associations for holy exercises are less frequented, or less enjoyed, Heb. x. 24, 25. Divisions then ensue: each leader endeavors to increase the number of his partisans: and thus all that union and harmony which should characterize the family of Christ is destroyed.

Hence arises also a coldness of heart towards God himself and a loss of fellowship with him — — — In a word, the almost inseparable effect of an irruption of iniquity into the church of God is, that “the love of many at least, if not of all, will wax cold.” One single “root of bitterness springing up will trouble and defile many.” Heb. xii. 15

* On Luke xxi. 17—19, which in Doddridge's Harmon of the Gospels, immediately precedes the text.

Such danger always existing, we proceed to suggest,

II. A PRESERVATIVE AGAINST IT.

Two things are certain, namely, that *on our continuance in well-doing our salvation depends*; and, that *by our continuance in well-doing our salvation is secured*: and the consideration of these two points will, under God, prove an excellent antidote against all the dangers to which we can be exposed.

Consider then, that,

1. *On our continuance in well-doing our salvation depends.*

To this truth the whole voice of scripture bears witness. We know full well that there are many promises made to the people of God; and that of those who have been given to Christ he will lose none. But it were a dreadful perversion of those promises, to think that we can be saved in any other way than that of "a patient continuance in well-doing." Rom. ii. 7. We must not attempt to make void the most positive declarations of holy writ, Ezek. xviii. 24, and xxxiii. 12, 13; Heb. x. 26, 27, 38, 39 ——— but must learn, like the apostle Paul himself, to make them an incentive to unwearied watchfulness and diligence, 1 Cor. ix. 27. ———

2. *By our continuance in well-doing our salvation is secured.*

The promise in our text is absolute and universal: and throughout every part of scripture God says to us, "Be thou faithful unto death; and I will give thee a crown of life" ——— We need not disquiet ourselves about God's fulfillment of his promises: let us only attend to our own duties, and leave him to accomplish his own word in his own time and way. We shall find at last that "not a jot or tittle of his word has ever failed" ——— The words of our text were fulfilled literally to *every true disciple* at the destruction of Jerusalem, when *every apostate* perished. A refuge was provided for the whole body of christians, at Pella, and a way was opened for their escape thither: and so it shall be in the day of judgment, when Christ's faithful servants *universally*, and they *only*, shall be saved.

3. The consideration of these truths would be an effectual preservative against spiritual declension.

Suppose iniquity to abound ever so much, what is that to *us*, except as a matter of grief and lamentation for the persons who commit it? Let the iniquity shew itself in any *persons*, or in any *degree*, it is no reason that our love to God and man should wax cold: it should rather operate as a reason for us to stir up our love to a flame, in order to impede the progress of the corruption, or at least to prevent its assaults upon our own souls; as travellers in a wilderness kindle fires around them, in order to protect themselves from the assaults of ravenous and ferocious beasts. At all events, however much any persons may injure their own souls, and endanger their own salvation, it becomes us to take care that they do not destroy or injure us ———

ADDRESS,

1. Let us above all things cultivate a spirit of love.

This is the characteristic feature of all God's children; and the want of it, whatever else we may possess, proves us to be only as sounding brass or as tinkling cymbals, 1 Cor. xiii. 1—3. A growth in this is the surest evidence of our growth in grace, 2 Thess. i. 3, 4. ——— and by this, more than by any thing else, is our establishment in the divine life secured, 1 Thess. iii. 12, 13. ——— Let us then "take care lest any root of bitterness spring up in our hearts;" and let us daily "put on charity, which is *the bond of perfectness*." Col. iii. 14.

2. Let us beg of God the assistance of his Holy Spirit.

The consideration of our final happiness depending so entirely on our own continuance in well-doing, would be discouraging, if we did not know, that God has promised to us the aids of his Spirit; and that "the grace of Christ shall be sufficient for us." See how graciously the Lord supported Paul, when all his christian friends had forsaken him in his greatest extremity: "At my first answer no man stood with me, but all men forsook me: I pray God that it may not be laid to their charge: notwithstanding, the Lord stood with me, and strengthened me." 2 Tim. iv. 16. Thus shall you find him present with you in every hour of trial, and be made "more than conquerors through him that loved you."

THE SINFULNESS OF MURMURING AGAINST GOD.

Prov. xix. 3.—The foolishness of man perverteth his way, and his heart fretteth against the Lord. (S. S.)

THE wickedness of the heart is deep and unsearchable—
 They who do not watch its motions, have no idea of its depravity—
 But they who diligently examine it may discover many evils—
 And by the light of God's word attain considerable knowledge—
 The disposition mentioned in the text deserves special attention.

I. ILLUSTRATE THE DISPOSITION HERE SPOKEN OF.

The careless and ungodly world are ever ready to cast blame on God.

1. On account of their sins.

They give the rein to every evil thought and desire—

—expose themselves to every kind of temptation—

—lay innumerable stumbling-blocks in their own way—

And thus become enslaved by vicious lusts and appetites—

Against these iniquities God denounces his judgment—

But the slaves of sin continue hardened in their evil ways—

They condemn even God himself as the author of their sins—

This was the conduct of Adam immediately after the fall*—

And it is too often imitated by his guilty descendants—

2. On account of their sorrows.

Sorrow is entailed on all as the punishment of the first transgression—

But most of the afflictions which men suffer are brought on them by their own folly—

Some involve themselves in distress through sloth or intemperance—

Others ruin themselves by imprudence and extravagance—

But all under their calamities "fret against the Lord"—

They are full of invectives against those that have been the more immediate occasions of their trouble—Numb. xvi. 11, 41.

They consider their lot as hard and severe—

And thus do they reflect on Providence rather than on themselves—

Cain, the first-born of Adam, indulged this malignant spirit—Gen. iv 13, 14.

Nor are there any sons of sorrow who do not follow his example—

Nor are believers themselves wholly free from this disposition.

* Gen. iii. 12. He obliquely condemns God for giving the woman to him

They watch and pray against their besetting sin—

Yet are sometimes brought under the power of it—

On these occasions they are tempted to fret against the Lord—

They are ready to expostulate with him like those of old—Isa. lviii. 3.

They forget how justly they might have been eternally forsaken—

And that the remaining power of their sins is the consequence both of former habits, and of present neglects—

Under afflictions also they feel too much proneness to murmur—

What sinful impatience did the holy Elijah manifest!—1 Kings xix. 4.

Even Job himself preserved not wholly a becoming temper—Job vii.

15, 16.

This disposition however is most hateful in the sight of God.

II. THE EVIL OF IT.

It betrays the most *deplorable ignorance*.

God is not, nor can be, the author of sin—

He maintains in all things the character given of him—Deut. xxxii. 4.

Hence St. James shews the folly of casting blame on God—James i.

13, 14.

Nor can God punish any of us more than our iniquities deserve—

Hence the expostulation of the prophet is unanswerable—Lam. iii. 39.

Besides, to fret against God is not the way to interest him in our behalf—

Nor will it tend to the peace and composure of our own spirits—

It is as unprofitable to us as it is unjust towards him—

True wisdom would teach us to humble ourselves in his presence—

And to renew our supplications with greater earnestness—

This conduct is as sure to succeed, as the other is to fail of success—

Prov. xxviii. 13.

It manifests the most *obstinate impenitence*.

Both sins and sorrows ought to produce humility—

When they increase our rebellion, our state is almost desperate—Isa. i. 5.

How awfully does such a temper characterize God's enemies!—Rev.

xvi. 9.

And make us resemble those that are consigned over to perdition!—Matt

viii. 12.

Surely nothing more heinous can be laid to our charge—

Nor any thing more speedily fit us for destruction—

It evinces the most *consummate arrogance*.

To fret and murmur is, in fact, to reprove God—

God himself considers it as a direct attack upon him—Mal. iii. 13, 14.

And can any thing be more presumptuous in such worms as we?

St. Paul reprobates this impiety with holy indignation—Rom. ix. 20.

And every one who allows himself in it, must answer it at his peril—

We conclude with suitable *ADVICE*.

I. Let us search into the occasions of our sins and sorrows

We may be surprised into sin by a sudden temptation—

But may trace our fall to preceding unwatchfulness—

Nor can we expect God to keep us, if we neglect to keep ourselves—

We are rarely earnest enough in using the means of safety—

We are too backward to meditation, prayer, and fasting—

Our afflictions also may have come without any misconduct on our part—

But who has not merited them by his sins?—

Men should only be considered as instruments in God's hands—Ps. xvii

13, 14

And the consideration of his will should silence every murmur—2 Sam. xvi. 10.

2. Let us always be careful to justify God.

We may not always be able to account for his dispensations—

But we should not on that account doubt the equity of them—

Whatever we suffer, we should not “charge God foolishly”—

Under the darkest dispensations we should say as the Psalmist—Ps. xxii.

2, 3.

If we wait we shall see the wisdom of many things which now seem utterly inexplicable—

We may rest assured that David’s assertion shall be verified—Ps. li. 4.

3. Let us see what improvement may be made of our troubles.

There is no rod which has not a voice to us—

Our very sins may be permitted, in order to humble us—

And to make us more thankfully cleave to the Saviour—

Our trials, of whatever kind, are to purge away our dross—

And to fit us for eternal rest—

To view them in this light will greatly compose our minds—

Instead of fretting against the Lord, we shall be thankful to him—

And instead of increasing our misery, we shall make it a mean of joy.

THE FOLLY OF CREATURE-CONFIDENCE.

Hos. v. 13.—When Ephraim saw his sickness, and Judah saw his wound, then went Ephraim to the Assyrian, and sent to king Jareb: yet could he not heal you, nor cure you of your wound. (S. S.)

MEN continually provoke God to chastise them, but rarely make a due improvement of his chastisements. Instead of turning to God, they dishonor him more by applying to the creature under their distress rather than to him. The ten tribes, when punished for their willing compliance with Jeroboam’s edicts,* sought repeatedly to the Assyrians for help instead of humbling themselves before God: but they found, as “Judah” also did on similar occasions, that their confidence in the creature served only to involve them in shame and disappointment.

Taking the text simply as an historical fact, we deduce from it two observations, which deserve our consideration.

I. MEN, IN TIMES OF TROUBLE, ARE PRONE TO LOOK TO THE CREATURE FOR HELP, RATHER THAN TO GOD.

This was one of the most common and heinous sins of the Jewish nation:† and it is universal also amongst ourselves.

1. In troubles of a temporal nature.

* Ver. 11, 12. God consumed them as moth does a garment, or as a rottenness the bones, secretly, slowly, gradually, effectually.

† Sometimes they relied on Egypt; Isaiah xxx. 1—3, and xxxi. 1. Sometimes on Assyria (as Manahem did on Paul, 2 Kings xv. 19, and Ahaz did on Tiglath-pileser, 2 Kings xvi. 7,) and sometimes on themselves, Isaiah xxii. 8—11. “Jareb” here certainly means the king of Assyria: but whether it was his proper name, or a name given him by the prophet, is uncertain. It means *Defender*, and might be applied to him in a taunting manner. In this view it would be a very severe sarcasm. See 2 Chron. xxviii. 20.

In *sickness of body*, we lean, like Asa, 2 Chron. xvi. 12, on the physician. In *distress of mind*, we complain and murmur; but forget to pray, Gen. iv. 13, 14. In *straitened circumstances*, we expect relief from friends, or our own exertions. God is invariably our *last* refuge.

2. In spiritual troubles.

Under *conviction of sin*, we betake ourselves to the observance of duties and make resolutions to amend our lives, instead of fleeing to Christ as the refuge of lost sinners, Isaiah lv. 2. In *seasons also of temptation*, or *desertion*, we adopt a thousand expedients to remove our burthens, but will not cast them on the Lord, 1 Sam. xvi. 14—16. Though foiled ten thousand times, we cannot bring ourselves to lie as clay in the potter's hands; but will rest in the means, instead of looking simply to God in the use of means.

But the longer we persist in it the more we shall find, that,

II. THE CREATURE CANNOT AFFORD US ANY EFFECTUAL SUCCOR.

There are circumstances indeed wherein friends may be instrumental to our relief: but they can do,

1. Nothing *effectual*.

The consolations which are administered by man, or by the vanities of this world, are poor, empty, transient, Jer. ii. 13. Not the whole universe combined can ever bring a man to "glory in tribulations," Rom. v. 3, and to say with Paul, "I take pleasure in them for the sake of Christ:" 2 Cor. xii. 10, as soon might they enable him to stop the sun in its course, as to reduce to experience the paradoxes of that holy apostle; 2 Cor. vi. 10.

2. Nothing *of themselves*.

It is not a little humiliating to see how weak are man's endeavors to heal either the disorders of the body, or the troubles of the soul, when God is pleased to withhold his blessing. The best prescriptions, or the wisest counsels, are even lighter than vanity itself. Reasonings, however just and scriptural, have no weight: advice, however sweetened with love and sympathy, is rejected: the very grounds of consolation are turned into occasions of despair, Ps. lxxvii. 2, 3. When God says, "Let there be light," there is light: but till then, the soul is shut up in impenetrable darkness. Job xxxiv. 29.

ADDRESS,

1. Let us guard against this sinful propensity, both in our national and personal concerns.

We cannot but see how prone we are, as a nation, to rest on human alliances, and human efforts. Would to God we could correct this fatal error, and trust more entirely in the great disposer of all events!

As individuals at least we may, and must, correct it. If we would have the blessing of God, and not his curse, we must renounce all creature-confidence, and trust in him alone. Jer xvii. 5—8. See David's example, Ps. lx. 11, and cxxi. 1, 2.

2. Let us especially rely on Christ as the healer of our souls.

He is "the healer of the nations," Rev. xxii. 2, "Jehovah, who healeth us," Exod. x. 29; there is no physician besides him; nor any balm, but his blood. We may use whatever means we will, either to pacify our conscience, or to purify the heart; but we shall find that they can "not heal us, nor cure us of our wound." But Christ is all-sufficient: he can in one moment purge us by his blood, and renovate us by his Spirit. To him then let us look with humble, uniform, unshaken affiance.

AGAINST SELF-CONFIDENCE.

1 Cor. x. 12.—Let him that thinketh he standeth, take heed lest he fall. (S. S.)

THE things which are recorded in the holy scriptures are written, not for the entertainment, but for the real improvement, of our minds. Doubtless, as gratifying our curiosity, there is no book under heaven so interesting as the Bible: but as exhibiting what must be realized in our own experience, as shewing us our duties and our difficulties, our helps and our remedies, our punishments and our rewards, it claims, infinitely beyond all other books, our unremitting attention. In this view the apostle, having mentioned the misconduct of the Israelites in the wilderness, and the destruction which they brought upon themselves by means of it, founds upon their history this solemn admonition; “*therefore* let him that thinketh he standeth, take heed lest he fall.”

From these words we may learn,

I. THAT ALL, EVEN THE MOST EMINENT, ARE LIABLE TO FALL.

The most distinguished characters of antiquity have fallen*— — — They have betrayed their weakness in those very points, wherein their eminence chiefly consisted† — — — Who then amongst us will presume to say, “I am in no danger of falling?”‡ — — —

II. THAT THE MORE SELF-CONFIDENT WE ARE, THE MORE LIKELY WE ARE TO FALL.

Self-confidence naturally emboldens us to rush into temptation — — — And necessarily provokes God to leave us to ourselves — — — By means of the former, our occasions of falling are greatly multiplied: by means of the latter, our ability to stand is utterly withdrawn|| — — — God, for his own honor’s sake, is concerned to let us fall, in order that we may know and confess, that our sufficiency for any good thing is derived from him alone§ — — —

III. THAT, IF WE WOULD BE KEPT FROM FALLING, WE MUST LOOK WELL TO OUR STEPS.

As in a slippery path peculiar caution is required, and an inattention to our steps will probably issue in some painful accident, so more especially is it necessary to use circumspection in the path of duty. Who can tell the snares and temptations that beset us? Who can tell what may be the consequences of any step we take? Who can reflect on all the circumstances that arose from one single glance of David’s eye, and not feel himself exposed to continual danger? The most important events of our lives may be traced to some trivial cause, some matter of pure indifference: and events,

* *Noah*, Gen. vi. 9, with ix. 21. *Lot*, 2 Pet. ii. 7, 8, with Gen. xix. 33—36. *David*, Acts xiii. 22, with 2 Sam. xi. 4, 5, 15. *Solomon*, (who was called Jeddiah, the beloved of the Lord, 2 Sam. xii. 24, 25.) 1 Kings xi. 1—9.

† *Abraham*, Rom. iv. 20, with Gen. xii. 12, 13, and xx. 2. 11. *Job*, Jam. v. 11, with Job iii. 3. *Moses*, Numb. xii. 3, with xx. 10, 11. *Jeremiah*, Jer. ix. 1, with xxi. 8, 9. *Paul*, Acts xx. 24, with xviii. 9. 10; when he seems to have been struck with a panic.

‡ John iv. 14, and 1 Pet. i. 23, shew the proper qualities and tendency of *grace*; but do not at all affect what the scriptures elsewhere affirm to be the tendency of our inherent *corruption*.

|| We have a striking example of this in Peter, who to gratify his curiosity went into the midst of his enemies, and was then left to experience his own weakness, Matt. xxvi. 58, 74.

§ Thus he acted towards the Israelites Deut. i. 42—44.

equally or more important, perhaps no less than the everlasting salvation of our souls, may depend on the very next step we take. Surely then we should in "all things be circumspect;" Exod. xxiii. 13; we should "take heed to our ways;" we should walk in an humble dependence on God for direction and support; we should cry to him continually "hold thou up my goings in thy paths, that my footsteps slip not." Ps. xvii. 5.

We shall conclude this subject with a few words of ADVICE.

1. To those who are offended at the falls of others.

Many, when they see a professor of religion act amiss, are ready to impute his misconduct to the gospel itself, as though christianity were only a cloak for hypocrites. But, considering the temptations that surround us, and the corruptions that are within us, it is rather a wonder that any stand, than that some should fall. We mean not to justify, or to extenuate, the sins of any: but we desire that religion should not be represented as promoting that, which it utterly condemns. Let the blame fall on those who merit it, and not be cast indiscriminately on all who profess godliness. Let Judas be branded as a traitor; but let not the odium of *his* offense attach to all the other apostles, and to their divine master.

2. To those who are endeavoring to walk uprightly before God.

It is of considerable use to persons when walking on slippery ground, to have hold of each other, that if one slip, the other may afford him immediate assistance. Many falls and bruises have been escaped by these means. Thus it is of great importance to christians to walk together in love, each helping to support his neighbor, and receiving help from others in the time of need. Eccl. iv. 9, 10. Let all then watch over one another with a godly jealousy. If one fall, let others endeavor instantly, in meekness, to raise him up. Gal. vi. 1. Above all, let every one know in whom his strength is; and pray continually, "hold thou me up and I shall be safe." Ps. cxix. 117.

"Now to him, who is able to keep us from falling, &c. be glory and majesty, dominion and power, both now and ever. Amen." Jude xxiv. 25

AGAINST HYPOCRISY.

Job xx. 4—7.—Knowest thou not this of old, since man was placed upon earth, that the triumphing of the wicked is short, and the joy of the hypocrite but for a moment; Though his excellency mount up to the heavens, and his head reach unto the clouds? yet he shall perish for ever, like his own dung: they which have seen him shall say, Where is he? (S. S.)

PREJUDICE or passion will miserably warp the judgment—

It will hide from us what we might know, and cause us to pervert what we do know—

Never was this more strongly exemplified than in the friends of Job—

Had they calmly considered, they might have comforted him in his affliction—

But, by a hasty misapplication of acknowledged truths, they most unjustly and cruelly condemned him—

Job had hinted to them the evil and danger of their conduct—Job xix 28, 29.

And Zophar, irritated at the caution, replies with great severity—

His words however, though misapplied, suggest to us two very important truths respecting sinners.

I THEIR PROSPERITY IS TRANSIENT.

Of sinners, some *make no profession* of religion, and others a *false profession*.

Each of these characters may enjoy, for a while, great prosperity.

The *profane* are often exalted to places of dignity and power—

They prosper in all their labors for wealth and preferment—

They not only despise, but perhaps persecute the godly—

They “triumph,” as though no evil should ever happen unto them—

This the Psalmist saw with deep regret—Ps. lxxiii. 3—12.

Hypocrites also frequently are held in estimation—Rev. iii. 1.

They are objects of envy to many an humble and contrite soul—

They will boast of experiences which might well be coveted—

And even attain considerable heights of joy—Matt. xiii. 20.

Their “excellency may mount up to the heavens, and their heads reach unto the clouds”—

But their prosperity will be of short duration.

Death will speedily seize upon the most stout-hearted sinner—

Then all, which he gloried in, shall come to an end—

None of his “pomp shall follow him,” or his “wealth be carried with him”—

The hypocrite also shall have a period put to his dissimulation—

He shall soon appear in his proper character—

The all-seeing God will discover the secrets of his heart—

Nor is this time at any great distance—Deut. xxxii. 35.

In comparison of eternity, the duration of his joy will be “but a moment.”

Then will they experience a sad reverse.

II. THEIR RUIN WILL BE TREMENDOUS.

The ungodly will in due time be visited for their offenses—

They will then “perish,”

1. To their own eternal shame.

Many portions of scripture appear to us indelicate—

But God’s representations of sin are surely just—

And well calculated to make us nauseate and loathe it—

Such is his description of the *ways* of sinners—2 Pet. ii. 22.

And such his declaration respecting their *end*—Compare Rev. iii. 16, with the text.

They will perish under circumstances of disgrace and ignominy—

Christ will not deign to own them before his Father—Matt. x. 33.

The angels will come forth to execute the vengeance of God upon them—

The saints would even “thrust them out of heaven” if they should seek admittance there—Luke xiii. 28.

The damned themselves will insult them with bitter taunts—Isa. xiv. 9—16.

Nor shall they ever cease to be objects of contempt and abhorrence—

This is told us in the plainest terms—Prov. xiii. 5; Dan. xii. 2.

Nor while they retain, as they must, their character, is it possible that their situation ever should be changed—Rev. xxii. 11.

2. To the astonishment of all that knew them.

The question “Where is he?” refers primarily to the utter extinction of the ungodly—

But it may well be considered also as an expression of surprise—

The *wicked* little think where their course will terminate—

If the rich man's request had been granted, Luke xvi. 23, 27, 28, what reply would his surviving brethren have made so soon as that in the text*—

The *hypocrites* also often escape detection in this world—

Perhaps they were celebrated, after their departure, as eminent saints—

We may conceive that their dearest friends, or their associates in holy exercise, may enquire after them in heaven—

What surprise and horror must seize them, when they hear of the doom which the heart-searching God has passed upon them †—

ADDRESS—"KNOW YOU NOT THIS?"

Know you not that this has been so from the beginning of the world?

Does not the word of God assert, that "it shall be ill with the wicked?" Isa. iii. 11; Ps. ix. 17.

Does not the most authentic history in the world prove it to have been so? ‡

Does not conscience itself testify that it shall be so still?—

If you know, do you not *consider* this?

Can any thing be more worthy of our consideration?—

If we have "but a moment," should we not improve that moment?—

Are we willing to perish in this ignominious and awful manner?—

Let us live no longer in the neglect of religion.

The gratifications of sense can last but for a little time—

But the consequences of neglecting God will endure for ever—

Surely the care of the soul is the "one thing needful"—

Nor let us rest in a "form of godliness" without experiencing "its power."

It will avail us little to deceive our fellow-creatures—

The higher we have been in their estimation, the deeper will be our disgrace—

Let us then go to Christ for the remission of past sins—

Let us approve ourselves to him in future, as "servants that need not be ashamed."—

And labor to be "sincere and without offense until his coming again."

* They would most probably have exclaimed, "*Where is he!* in hell! lifting up his eyes in torments! Is it really so? We never could have thought it: we had no doubt but that he was happy: he seemed to us as worthy and blameless a character as any: nor had he himself any doubts but that he was going to heaven."

† If a minister is to have those as his "joy and crown of rejoicing," who were truly converted by his ministry, we may, not improperly, suppose a degree of disappointment, if he miss those, concerning whom he had entertained the most sanguine hopes. We may suppose him, upon the first discovery, to say, "*Where is he!* What, *he* in hell! I often feared that I myself should go thither; but who would have thought that *he* should?" The Lord grant that this may never be realized by any of us!

‡ Where are now the antediluvian scoffers, the haughty Pharaoh, the treacherous Judas, the worldly-minded Demas, the heretical Hymenous? &c.

A CAUTION AGAINST DEPARTING FROM GOD.

Heb. iii. 12—14.—Take heed, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief, in departing from the living God. But exhort one another daily, while it is called to-day lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin. For we are made partakers of Christ, if we hold the beginning of our confidence stedfast unto the end. (S. S.)

THE consideration of the fullness and sufficiency of Christ, is that which animates the believer in all his conflicts: yet it is on no account to supersede our own care and watchfulness: on the contrary, it affords us the greatest encouragement to watch, because it ensures success to us in our endeavors, which without his almighty aid, would be of no avail—In this view it is that the inspired writer calls us to “consider the Apostle and High-Priest of our profession, Christ Jesus, who was not merely a servant, like Moses, but a son, the heir and Lord of all, yea, the very builder of that spiritual house, of which we profess ourselves to be a part”—On this truth he grounds the exhortation in the text,* in which he suggests,

I. A SOLEMN CAUTION.

Difficult as it is to come to God, we find it easy enough to depart from him—We should therefore be on our guard.

1. Against any departure from him.

While men are yielding to temptation, and turning aside from the ways of God, they cherish an hope that they may still preserve their interest in his favor, though they be not studious to do his will. But a departure of any kind, whether from the faith or practice of christianity, is nothing less than a departure from him who is the only source of life and happiness—We cannot therefore be too much on our guard against any secret declensions, which are so dishonorable to him whom we profess to love, and so destructive of our present and eternal welfare—

2. Against that unbelief from whence all declensions arise.

As faith is that which brings us to God, and keeps us stedfast in our adherence to him, so unbelief separates us from him, and, in proportion as it is harbored, invariably alienates us from the life of God—Whatever be the more immediate object of that unbelief, whether we attempt to lower the strictness of God's precepts, or question the veracity of his promises or threatenings, it proceeds equally from “an evil heart,” and brings with it the same pernicious consequences; it is a root of bitterness, which, if it be permitted to spring up, will cause every devout affection to wither and decay—We must therefore labor to eradicate it, if we would not eat for ever its bitter fruits—

That his caution may have its due effect, the apostle prescribes,

II. THE MEANS OF IMPROVING IT.

Sin is of a deceitful and hardening nature.

When “a backslider in heart” commits a sin, many thoughts will arise in his mind to palliate the evil, and to make him think that it will not be attended with any important consequences—Soon he begins to doubt whether the thing be evil at all; and, ere long, to justify it from the peculiarity of his circumstances—At first he felt some remorse; but presently his conscience becomes less tender, till at last it is altogether seared and callous; so that, notwithstanding he be miserably departed from God, he is regardless

* All the words between “Wherefore,” in ver. 7, and the text, are a parenthesis: we must therefore connect the text thus; “Wherefore” “take heed,” &c.

of his loss, and insensible of his danger—Who that has ever noticed the workings of his own heart, has not found, what a bewitching and besotting thing sin is? yea, who has not often seen reason to bewail its deceitful, hardening effects?—

To guard effectually against it we should watch over each other.

Sin, from the foregoing qualities, naturally hides itself from our view, and renders us inattentive to the means of prevention—But ignorant as we often are of our own spirit, we see clearly enough the defects of others; yea, perhaps we condemn with severity in others the very things which we allow in ourselves—To watch over each other therefore, and to warn each other of those declensions which we either see or apprehend, is a most valuable service; and, if performed with discretion and love, it can scarcely fail of producing the happiest effects—This is a duty to which God has solemnly called us in his word; Lev. xix. 17, and it is to be a part of our “daily” work—Our time for it will be very short: either we or our brother may be speedily removed; and our opportunity of benefiting his soul may be lost for ever—We should exhort one another therefore “daily, while it is called to-day;” and, though it is often an unpleasant office, we should use all fidelity in the execution of it—By this means we may restore a brother before he has relapsed too far, and preserve him from that departure from God, which would otherwise terminate in his destruction—

Still further to enforce the caution given us, the apostle adds

III. A MOTIVE TO REGARD IT.

Our final participation of Christ’s benefits depends on our steadfastness in the pursuit of them.

Without entering into the question, whether God has decreed the final perseverance of the saints, we may be fully assured, that none can obtain salvation but by persevering in the way of holiness to the end of life: the scriptures continually speak this language, “He that endureth unto the end, the same shall be saved:” “but if any man draw back, my soul shall have no pleasure in him”—Matt. xxiv. 13; Heb. x. 38. It is true that believers are already *in a measure* “partakers of Christ:” but the complete enjoyment of his benefits is reserved for the future life: and we must not only have a scriptural and well-founded confidence at first, but must keep it steadfast even to the end, in order to attain that full possession of our inheritance—

If any thing can stimulate us to caution, surely this must.

Eternity is at stake, and depends on our present condition: according as we approve ourselves to the heart-searching God, will our state be fixed for ever—Is it not madness to be remiss and careless under such circumstances? Would any one, who should have reason to think his house were on fire, sit still without endeavoring to find out the latent grounds of his alarm? And shall we know our proneness to unbelief, and not guard against its operation, lest it lead us to apostacy? Shall we acknowledge the deceitful, hardening nature of sin, and not exhort each other to mortify and subdue it?—Surely if we have the smallest concern for our souls, we shall not only regard the caution given us in the text, but labor to improve it in the way prescribed—

ADDRESS,

1. Those who have never come to God at all.

The foregoing subject is *in itself* applicable to those only who profess religion; but it may be accommodated to those also who make no such profession; for if they who have come to God are in danger of departing from him, and they who have enjoyed a scriptural confidence, may lose it; if they, who have believed may “make shipwreck of their faith,” and they, who

have "begun in the Spirit, may end in the flesh:" if they, who have "begun to run well, may be hindered," and they, who have "escaped the pollutions of the world, may again be entangled therein and overcome;" and, lastly, if they who "have been enlightened, and have tasted the good word of God and the powers of the world to come, may so fall away as never to be renewed unto repentance;" What must become of those who have never experienced any of these things? Can they be safe? Can they have any scriptural hope of heaven? If the strongest have so much need of caution, and the most circumspect such reason to fear the deceitful, hardening effects of sin, surely the careless have need to tremble, lest they "die in their sins," and "be driven away in their wickedness"—If all, except two, of those who came out of Egypt, perished in the wilderness, can they hope to enter into the land of Canaan, who have never once come forth from their spiritual bondage?—The point is clear; may God enable us to lay it to heart, and to consider it with the attention it deserves:—

2. Those who are conflicting with their spiritual enemies.

Much has already been spoken to you both in a way of caution and direction: we beg leave to add a word of encouragement—The thing, against which you are chiefly guarded, is unbelief; because *that* is the true source of all apostasy—We now would say, Be strong in faith giving glory to God—"Faith is the shield wherewith you are to quench the fiery darts" of your enemies—Only believe; and Omnipotence will come to your support—Only believe; and you shall experience "the mighty working of *his* power, who raised Christ from the dead"—Commit yourself to him "who is able to keep you from falling; and he will present you faultless before the presence of his glory with exceeding joy."

DANGER OF RELIGIOUS INDECISION.

Luke ix. 61.—Lord, I will follow thee; but let me first go bid them farewell which are at home at my house. (Pr.)

WHEN the marriage supper was provided, and the guests were invited, they all with one consent began to make excuse. And here, out of three that were invited to follow the Saviour, two are for pleading some delay; one wanted to go and bury his father, and the other to take leave of his friends. There is always something or another to hinder us in the path of duty, and to weaken our resolutions in following the Lord fully: it is therefore our wisdom to see the danger, and to guard against it. For this purpose let us

Consider the resolution mentioned in the text, and what are its principal defects.

1. He wished to follow Christ, but there was something of more urgent necessity that must first be attended to.—Thus the sick oftentimes resolve to reform their lives when they recover, but remain as before. The youth wishes to be religious but thinks that so grave a subject had better be deferred to old age. He must have a little more pleasure in his early days, and then he will attend to the concerns of his soul, will repent and obey the gospel. The servant must be free from his master, and then he thinks of becoming the servant of God. Some are for putting matters off for a few years, others only for a few days, when they shall be more at liberty from present diffi-

culties and engagements.— — —The folly of all this is very apparent: the concerns of the soul are of as much importance at this moment as they can be at any future time; life is uncertain, and every delay is a step towards final impenitence. Heb. iii. 8.

2. The person who formed the resolution in the text, evidently made it in his own strength.—Here is no reference whatever to divine assistance, no dependance upon the Lord, no seeking for grace to help in time of need, but an unqualified and self-confident resolution. "Lord, I will follow thee." How easy and how vain are such promises, yet how frequently do they meet our observation. The children of Israel said, "we will serve the Lord;" but considered not that his service requireth the renunciation of all their idols, and of all their sins. Josh. xxiv. 19. And in order to follow Christ we must deny ourselves and take up the cross, which grace only can enable us to do. John xv. 5.

3. The resolution when formed, seemed to depend on the consent of his friends, for though he speaks only of taking his leave, he probably wished to know whether they approved of the step he was about to take. Had he been influenced by proper motives, instead of leaving them behind, he would rather have endeavored to bring them with him, to follow Jesus in the way. Thus did Andrew and Philip, John i. 40—45; the woman of Samaria, John iv. 28—30; and others. Luke viii. 39.— — —But here was no seeking first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, no forsaking all for Christ, but a cleaving to worldly connexions rather than to him. Matt. x. 37.

4. Instead of following Christ cheerfully and with all his heart, he appeared somewhat dejected at the thought, and must go and take leave of his friends, as if he were about to die, and should see them no more. Such are the melancholy apprehensions which some persons entertain of true religion; they imagine it would be injurious to their worldly interest, and unfit them for the common duties and enjoyments of life, and that therefore they must take a final leave of the concerns of the present world.— — —Whereas, by cleaving to the Lord we should be better prepared to serve our generation, and to enjoy the blessings of providence. Religion improves all the relations, and brightens and endears to us all the comforts of life. Eccles. ix. 7.

5. By going home to his friends, he would expose himself to great temptation, and be in danger of breaking the resolution already formed. They would upbraid him with folly for attaching himself to a sect every where spoken against, and to a person so generally despised.— — —Paul consulted not with flesh and blood, neither must we, if we would follow the Lamb whithersoever he goeth. Gal. i. 16. Those who are on the Lord's side must be as Levi, they must not know their own kindred. Deut. xxxiii. 9.

1 This subject may serve as a warning to those who trifle with the calls of the gospel. Here was a looking back, a lingering after the world, and Christ pronounces such to be unfit for the kingdom of God: verse 62.

2. Nothing but a decided attachment to Christ, and a determination to sacrifice all for his sake, can constitute us his disciples.

3. Let us beware of the ensnaring influence of worldly connexions, and of every inordinate affection; for these, rather than grosser evils, are the ordinary impediments to our salvation. Matt. xvi. 26.

UNGODLY PROFESSORS ADMONISHED.

James iv. 8.—Draw nigh to God, and he will draw nigh to you: cleanse your hands, ye sinners, and purify your hearts, ye doubled-minded. (Pr.)

In the early period of the christian church it was said, that “great grace was upon them all:” but as things proceeded, many were found amongst them who were mere professors, having nothing of religion but the form.

Such was the case in James’ time.—His epistle is addressed to the believing Jews; but in writing to them, he at the same time addresses himself to unbelievers among them, as in the language of our text.—He supposes indeed that they did not live without prayer; but that when they prayed, they received not, because they asked amiss; ver. 3.—He also describes them as being of a worldly spirit, and double-minded in all their ways. Hence the pointed language now before us.

I. CONSIDER THE CHARACTERS ADDRESSED.

1. Though they were professors of religion, they are considered as far from God.—In all their prayers and religious duties, they never “draw nigh to God,” have no communion with him; and though belonging to the church, they are living without God in the world.—Characters of this description are still to be found in every christian society.

2. Their “hands” and their “hearts” are supposed to be defiled.—They had not laid aside all malice, and all guile, and hypocrisy, and envies, and all evil speakings, that as new-born babes they might desire the sincere milk of the word. 1 Pet. ii. 1, 2. They are still under the power of darkness, and the dominion of sin: their hands are full of oppression and fraud, and their hearts full of impurity.—They live after the flesh, and war after it; fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind.

The apostle calls them “sinners,” though they may profess to be saints, and be numbered with the people of God.

3. Under a profession of religion, they were nevertheless “double-minded;” halting between God and Baal, and were sometimes this, and sometimes that.—When conscience is awakened by the application of some powerful truth, or by the occurrence of some alarming providence, then they are on the Lord’s side.—When in the company of pious people, they can be pious too: but when they are in the world, and mix with worldly company, they are on the side of the world. 1 Kings xxii. 4.

II. THE COUNSEL GIVEN THEM: “Draw nigh to God—cleanse your hands—purify your hearts.”

And what does all this denote? Some may think it sufficient to answer,—pray to God, and reform what is amiss in your conduct.—This indeed is included, but this is not all; it includes repentance towards God, and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ.

1. The exhortation supposes that God is accessible through a mediator, for without this there would be no invitation to “draw nigh.”—If no mediator were provided, we should be like the fallen angels, without hope: the name of the Lord could not have been invoked, with any assurance of success.—But the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth from all sin: we may therefore draw nigh to him, though we are “sinners,” great sinners and have offended against light and knowledge.—The fountain is opened for sin and uncleanness, and we may wash and be clean.

2. Though exhorted to “cleanse our hands and purify our hearts,” these acts are not preparatory to repentance and faith, but the very things them-

selves.—No other way of drawing nigh to God has the promise of acceptance: no other cleansing will purify the heart.—The influence of some inferior principle may be sufficient to cleanse the hands, but not the heart; but the cleansing will only be partial, and not lasting.

Genuine repentance will both cleanse the hands and the heart.—Weeping at the Saviour's feet, a Magdalene was made clean; and of the impure Corinthians it is said, but ye are sanctified, ye are justified, in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God. 1 Cor. vi. 11. Isai. xxx. 21, 22.

A sinner under the first conviction generally reforms his conduct, and casts away his open sins; but his heart can only be purified by faith; and without this, there can be no entering into the kingdom of God. Matt. v. 8.

III. THE ENCOURAGEMENT TO COMPLY WITH THIS ADVICE: "God will draw nigh to you."

This language does not imply that man is the first mover in the great affair of salvation: far from it. We are apprehended of Christ, before we apprehend him: he draws us, and we run after him. John vi. 44, xii. 32. Phil. iii. 12.

But it does suppose that repentance precedes forgiveness, and believing in Jesus.—The Lord may draw near to us in his secret influence on the heart, and does so before we draw near to him; but not in a way of fellowship and communion—not as a God pardoning iniquity, and giving rest to the soul. We must come to Christ by faith, before that can be obtained. 2 Cor. vi. 17. 18.

How important are these words: "I will draw near to you"—what condescension, for the great God to draw near to a worm of the dust; yes, near to you; as a father, a friend, and a guide—near to you in death, when every other friend must take their leave. Ps. xlviii. 14.

Oh what a state, for a sinner to be called to die, when no one can help him but God, and for God to be afar off!

THE SCORNER REPROVED.

Proverbs xiv. 9.—Fools make a mock of sin. (Pr.)

In the esteem of this pious philosopher, religion is the highest wisdom, and sin the greatest folly. Such is the general purport of his characteristics; but in the text especially, he has marked with the most degrading epithet a species of levity deserving of the severest rebuke. It is not enough for some men that they are sinners: they must add folly to their depravity, and treat the greatest of all evils as a light and trifling concern.

I. ENQUIRE WHO THEY ARE THAT MAY BE SAID TO "make a mock at sin."

1. They are those who excuse or palliate the evil of their own conduct, treating sin as a light matter, and saying of it as Lot did of Zoar, is it not a little one.—Some plead nature, some custom, some necessity, and others example: but as the prophet said, will ye plead for Baal? Is it possible to excuse or justify so great an abomination? Every attempt to conceal its enormity, to throw the blame on others, or on the circumstances in which

we are placed, is a fearful sign of impenitence, and of that inconsiderate levity which the wise man so severely reprehends. Proverbs xxviii. 13.

2. Those make a mock at sin who can commit it without regret, and glory in their shame, instead of being humbled for it. Phil. iii. 19. — — — There are scorers who turn sin into a jest, and even boast of their wickedness. Prov. x. 23. — — — Injuries done to fellow men, such as are adapted to fill the mind with horror and detestation, are too often made the subject of unfeeling ridicule. 2 Sam. ii. 14—16; Prov. xxvi. 18, 19. — — — Some will dare to sin for the diversion of others, and to commit acts of public injustice for the sake of a little popularity. Hos. vii. 3. Acts xii. 2, 3; xxiv. 27.

3. Those who rush into sin upon the slightest temptation, show how lightly they regard it, and with what contempt they treat the divine authority. The profane Esau could sell his birthright for a mess of pottage, and the covetous Judas betray his master for thirty pieces of silver. Zech. xi. 13. From such mean and mercenary motives do men sacrifice their conscience and their souls; and not only sell themselves to work wickedness, but sell themselves for nought.

4. Some make a mock at sin by scoffing at their reprovers, and treating them with utter disdain. Such was the conduct of Ahab towards Micaiah, and of Herod towards John the Baptist. 1 Kings xxii. 8; Mark vi. 18, 19. On the same principle, parental authority is frequently despised, and ministerial fidelity treated with levity and scorn. Prov. xiii. 1.

5. How lightly some men regard sin may be seen in their rejection of the atonement, and substituting in its stead their own endeavors to appease the divine anger, and to commend themselves to God. All self-righteousness is founded in light thoughts of sin, and leads to a rejection of the only way of salvation. Prov. vii. 36.

6. Some even go so far as to take pleasure in the sins of others, and turn into a scene of mirth what will issue in lamentation and woe. Hab. ii. 15. It is sufficiently evil to mock at human suffering, but inconceivably more so to mock at that which leads to endless perdition; first to tempt men to the commission of sin, and then to be diverted with their impiety.

II. THE FOLLY AND DANGER OF SUCH CONDUCT.

It is sufficiently to our shame that we are sinners; but it is the height of folly to make a mock of sin.

1. Because of its intrinsically evil nature. Sin had its origin in the bottomless pit, 1 John iii. 8; whence it issued, and infected the nature of man, and is opprobriously termed "the filthiness" of the flesh and of the spirit. 2 Cor. vii. 1. It is the disgrace of our nature, and by it we have debased ourselves even unto hell. Isai. lvii. 9. It is the sum of all evil: from hence proceed evil thoughts, evil speaking, an evil conscience, and evil deeds. It is worse than death, for death would have no sting without it; and worse than hell, for it is sin that creates the never-dying worm, and the fire that cannot be quenched.

2. The present consequences of sin show the extreme folly of making light of it. It is pregnant with all the evils that exist in the world, of whatever kind or degree; and who can calculate this mighty sum? Whatever calamity befalls a sinner in the present life, it may truly be said to him in the language of the prophet, "thy way and thy doings have procured these things unto thee." Jer. iv. 18. The ruin and distress brought upon the conscience has induced others, besides Judas, to cast themselves directly into hell, to get rid of their horror and despair. And even where sin is re-

pented of and pardoned, it brings unutterable distress upon the soul. Ps. xxxviii. 3.

3. The sufferings of Christ for sin, and the price paid for our redemption, awfully demonstrate the folly and madness of making light of sin. Behold the Son of God prostrate in Gethsemane, witness his agony and bloody sweat; see him on the cross, and hear his dying cries; and then say whether the cause of these sufferings can be regarded with indifference, or be made a matter of idle jest. No where does the evil of sin appear so great as in the sacrifice of the Son of God. Isai. liii. 4, 5.

4. The final ruin and destruction which sin will bring upon the soul in a future world. Could we descend into the dark and silent chambers of the grave, and behold the bodies of the wicked crumbling into dust, and becoming a prey to rottenness and worms; could we draw aside the veil that conceals from us the world of spirits, and plunge into all the thickest horrors of the bottomless pit, and see the justice of God pouring out a tempest of fire upon lost souls to all eternity; surely we could not be disposed to make a mock at sin, or live any longer in a state of impenitence and unbelief. A fire is kindled in his wrath, that shall burn to the lowest hell.

Let mockers beware then, lest their bands be made strong, and they be left to wonder and perish.—Be not deceived: God is not mocked: whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap. Those who now deride religion, and make a mock at sin, will find that God also will laugh at their calamity, and mock when their fear cometh. Prov. i. 25—27.

FATAL ISSUE OF FINAL IMPENITENCE.

Job ix. 4.—Who hath hardened himself against him, and hath prospered. (Pr.)

Bilhad, one of Job's friends, considered his complaints as amounting to a rebellion against God: ch. viii. 3. Job is greatly moved at this, and disowns the charge with abhorrence. "He is wise in heart, and mighty in strength; who hath hardened himself against him, and hath prospered?"

The words however imply, that there is such a thing as for a man so to harden himself as to contend with God: and that where this is the case it is certain to come to a dreadful issue.

I. ENQUIRE WHEREIN THIS HARDNESS OF HEART CONSISTS.

1. The word signifies a spirit that is *obstinate and incorrigible*; full of perverseness, keeping up a contention with God.— — —In scripture language it is being stiff-necked, and uncircumcised in heart and ears. Neh. x. 16, 17; Acts vii. 51.

2. It is descriptive of that *rebellious spirit*, which discovers itself under the various dispensations of God, both in a way of mercy and of judgment — — —Thus Pharaoh acted: sometimes he seemed humble and willing to submit: but when the judgment was withdrawn, he resumed his former resolution, and continued to harden himself against God.

3. There is also a *judicial hardness* to which sinners are liable, in a way of righteous judgment for their iniquities.— — —God is said to have hardened Pharaoh's heart; not that he produces evil in the mind of man which is utterly impossible, James i. 13: but through man's perverseness the divine dispensations make him worse instead of better.— — —If the

providences of God do not soften the human mind, it generally becomes thereby more hardened. Thus also the gospel produces a similar effect, where its influence is rejected: and instead of being a savor of life unto life, it becomes a savor of death unto death. 2 Cor. ii. 16

This is not owing to any defect in the gospel, or in the dispensations of God towards us; but to the depravity of the human heart, which perverts the means of salvation into those of destruction.— — — Hence this impenitent hardness is ascribed to man, as well as to God; to show that God has no influence in the matter, so as to affect man's free agency and accountability,

II. NOTICE SOME OF THE INSTANCES IN WHICH THIS SIN IS STILL COMMITTED.

Ineffectual and dangerous as it is for any one to harden himself against God, it is a sin no less prevalent than formerly; and it will become us to notice the different ways in which it operates, that we may be warned against it.

1. It appears in indulging *hard thoughts of God*, of his government and of his holy law: in esteeming him as a hard master, and in considering sinful propensities as an excuse for sinful actions, though no one thinks of excusing the offense of others against himself on the ground of such a plea. — — — The indulgence of such thoughts lead on to final impenitence.

2. It manifests itself in a rejection or *dislike of God's way of salvation*. This impenitent aversion is directed against its freeness, as placing all men alike on a level. — — — Against its sovereignty, in that God should have mercy on whom he will have mercy: and its language is, "why doth he yet find fault?" — — — This was the stumbling block to the hardened and unbelieving Jews. Isa. vi. 9, 10; Rom. ix. 29—33.

3. Persisting in an evil course, *amidst many convictions and fears*, is another instance of this sort of depravity. — — — Pharaoh knew that he was wrong, and yet he dared to persist. Many have great light and strong convictions, yet they have loved idols, and after them they will go. — — — Some under threatening afflictions will do the same.

4. This hardness of heart appears in the *resistance that is offered to the hand of God in providence* instead of being humbled under it. — — — The great end of adverse providences is to make us willing to accept the punishment of our iniquity. Lev. xxvi. 41. — — — Instead of this, many are like Ephraim, a bullock unaccustomed to the yoke: and when their plans are frustrated, they still persevere in rebellion against God. Isa. ix. 10. — — — This is desperate wickedness, and braving the divine judgments. It is an evil thing to be haughty in the day of prosperity, but more so in a day of adversity: this is incorrigible wickedness.

5. *Presumptuously tempting God*, amidst the most affecting means of salvation, is another instance of this hardness of heart. It was thus with Israel in the wilderness. God spared them time after time, yet they rebelled against him. They were warned of this impenitence and unbelief, five hundred years afterwards, Ps. xcv. 8—11: and after a thousand years more, the same warning was repeated, but without effect, for they perished in their unbelief. Heb. iii. 12.

III. THE FATAL ISSUE OF FINAL IMPENITENCE: "Who hath hardened himself against him, and prospered?"

1. The longer you continue in this state, the *more hardened* you will become, till at last you will be past feeling. Ephes. iv. 19. This is the natural effect of unbelief, and sinning against God.

2. This also is the way in which God *perishes men* for their impenitence. Isa. vi. 8. And if God should give you up to this state, where would you be at last!

3. *The end* of this impenitence and hardness of heart is fearfully described by an apostle, and should warn us of our danger. Rom. ii. 5—9.

Let it be remarked however, that these awful consequences proceed on the supposition that this impenitence is finally persisted in, and that mercy is promised to the returning sinner, Isa. lv. 7.— — Many have been brought to drop the controversy with God, as Ephraim did, and have found mercy, Jer. xxxi. 19, 20. And all other impenitent sinners are invited and encouraged to follow his example, Isa. xlii. 12, 13.

DANGER OF SELF-DECEPTION.

Proverbs xiv. 12.—There is a way which seemeth right unto a man, but the end thereof are the ways of death. (Pr.)

HOWEVER diversified the pursuits of men, all are in search of happiness. Some seek it in the things of this life, and leave the concerns of futurity unheeded. This their way seems wise to them, in making sure of what is, though it can scarcely appear to themselves to be "right." Others are seeking the gratification of their depraved appetites in a way that is opposite to their own consciences, and this therefore cannot seem to be right. The text then must be understood of those who think well of their own way, but who are under a gross deception. It is a painful thought, that there not only are multitudes who know that they are in a wrong path, but many more who think they are right even while "the end thereof are the ways of death."

The following considerations may account for this kind of self-deception, or show how it is that men walking in a wrong way, may, nevertheless think it to be right.

1. Much of this is to be attributed to the *influence of education*. — — We are not aware of the innumerable instances in which we are influenced by the principles imbibed in early life, yet this first bias of the mind may make things appear to be right, which in themselves are utterly wrong, and lead to fatal consequences. How else could it be accounted for, that Saul of Tarsus should not only be induced to persecute the church of God and waste it, but to think that he ought verily to do it? Thus it is that many are attached to certain forms and systems of religion, because they have been brought up to them, and for no other reason. In different places, but from a similar cause, paganism, mahomedanism, corrupted judaism, popery, and other superstitions, are all thought to be right, though the end thereof are the ways of death. Being the religion of their forefathers, it has altogether the appearance of being right. It is the same where the truth is only partially received, and some of its leading doctrines rejected; and where they teach for doctrines the commandments of men.

2. This kind of deception arises in part from *the power of example*, and the countenance of the generality. — — The example of those around us has an inconceivable influence on our principles and conduct. A variety of things positively evil, and which might easily be known to be so, appear nevertheless to be right, because they are practiced and pursued by a large

portion of mankind. Setting our affections on things on the earth is a great evil, condemned in the scriptures; and yet this is the way of the world. The wicked boasteth of his heart's desire, and blesseth the covetous whom the Lord abhorreth. To a great majority of the Jewish nation it seemed right to be of the same religion as their rulers, though it included a rejection of Christ and his gospel; and it is much the same with the great bulk of other nations.

3. *The favorable opinion which good people may form of us*, may make our way seem to be right. — — — Our chief acquaintance may be with serious people, we may go with them to the house of God, and enjoy a portion of their esteem. They may hope that we are the followers of Jesus, and treat us as such; and so we may conclude that we are right, and that all is well. This seems to be the case with the foolish virgins, who in the parable are associated with the wise. But if we wish not to be deceived, we must not trust to the judgment or good opinion of any one, but desire that God would search us and set us right.

4. Many a way seems to be right, merely *because it is our own way*. — — — It is the way which we have chosen, and to which we have been accustomed. It is often seen in temporal things, that a man thinks his way to be right, because it is his way; and it is much more so in the concerns of religion. Hence many evils may cleave to us, and we see nothing of their sinfulness. We may even be altogether selfish and covetous, and not be aware of it; full of pride, and not perceive it; worldly-minded, vain and conceited, and yet think that all is right.

5. *The resemblance between real religion and what has only the appearance of it*, may be another cause of this deception. — — — In many instances this will make a way appear to be right, though it is leading us on to destruction. Self-righteousness has a seemly appearance, and promises fair for the kingdom of heaven; for it will be pleaded that we must be religious and devout, and do something towards our salvation. Yet it is certain, that by the works of the law shall no flesh living be justified. — — — Those who rest in a few delusive impressions and feelings, by which the heart is moved, but not changed, may flatter themselves with being the subjects of true religion; and those also who possess a mere speculative acquaintance with the gospel, are often very confident of being right, and of having truth on their side. — — — Those who rest in a partial reformation, and who comply with some of the duties of religion, may think that all is safe and right, while they are strangers to the love of God, and not renewed in the spirit of their mind. — — — Now the end of all these things is death; yet they seem to be right, and bear some resemblance to true religion. Thus, in innumerable ways are we in danger of being deceived, and falling into perdition.

Let us then look well to our way, and see that it be such as God has marked out for us in his holy word. Let us examine well our motives, and see that we are influenced by better principles than those of mere education, or example, or the good opinion of others. See that our hearts be truly right with God, and that we are walking in the way that is everlasting.

A CAUTION TO HEARERS.

Luke viii. 18.—Take heed, therefore, how ye hear. (B.)

THIS caution is an inference from the preceding parable of the Sower.—

In the parallel passage of St. Mark, iv. 24, it is, “Take heed *what ye hear*.” We shall explain and enforce the caution in both these senses.—

I. TAKE HEED WHAT YE HEAR.

This both concerns all ministers of the word, and all hearers.—

It is the indispensable duty of ministers to take heed what they preach.—That their doctrine be *true*, that they may not deceive their hearers —That it be *important*, that they may not trifle with them.—That it be *suited* to their state and character, that they may “rightly divide the word of truth, and give to every description of hearers their portion of meat in due season.

Hearers should take heed what they hear. They must not take it for granted that what they hear is *true, important, and suited to their state and character*; but must bring it to the test of the holy scriptures, and examine it thereby. For this purpose they should read the scriptures, and endeavor to make themselves well acquainted with them, and understand them. And if they find that, according to the divine oracles, the doctrines which they hear answer the above description, they must so “take heed what they hear” as to attend to it, and consider it maturely, that they may thoroughly understand and lay it to heart, and that it may have its designed effect upon their spirit and conduct.—

Our Lord’s caution, however, according to this Evangelist, implied another thing, equally important :

II. TAKE HEED HOW YE HEAR.

Take heed, that you do not hear so inattentively, and in such a prayerless state of mind, as not to understand, nor afterwards meditate on the word, and so receive the seed as by the “way-side.” Matt. xiii. 19. That having heard and understood in a measure what you heard, and being affected thereby, you do not rest in any ineffectual and transient impressions made on your mind, and, therefore, be offended and fall away in time of trial and temptation; but that the truth be deeply fixed in your mind, and that you may have “root in yourself.” Matt. xiii. 20, 21. That you guard against the cares of the world, the love of deceitful riches, the vain pleasures of life, and “desires after other things;” those pernicious weeds, which in so many choke the springing blade, or forming ear, so that no fruit is brought forth to perfection. Matt. xiii. 22.

But hear—in *simplicity of intention*, having a single eye to the glory of God and your own salvation, present and eternal.—In *sincerity of heart*, truly and earnestly desiring to discover and put away every error, and every sin, and to know and do the whole will of God.—In *humility*, conscious that you are unworthy to know the great and important things revealed in the gospel, respecting the will of God, and the way of salvation from such great misery to such great happiness; unworthy that God should speak to you by his Son, and his inspired Prophets, Apostles, and Evangelists. We should think ourselves undeserving that a nobleman, still more a king, or an angel, should speak to us; how much more that Christ, or God, should make known to us his will.—Hence you should hear with *reverence*, remembering it is God’s word, and that you are in God’s presence, and under God’s eye.—With *seriousness*, persuaded the truth you hear is no light matter; but for your life, your better and everlasting life. Would you not hear with seriousness

the advice of a skillful physician respecting your health, or of a lawyer concerning your property? And will you not hear with equal, nay with greater seriousness, what concerns you infinitely more?—With deep *attention*; let no sentence, or even word, that is uttered, escape you, and fail not afterwards seriously to consider what you have heard, and to examine yourself thereby. With *prayer*, while hearing, and before, and after you hear, “for the spirit of wisdom and revelation;” Eph. i. 17; persuaded “the things of God knoweth no man but by the Spirit of God.” 1 Cor. ii. 11, 14. Hear with *faith*, firmly believing the certainty and importance of what is taught you from the oracles of God, always remembering the “word preached” does not profit those who hear it, in whom it is not “mixed with faith.” Heb. iv. 2. With *love* to the truth, though searching and cutting, though disagreeable to your mind, like a bitter medicine to your taste, or giving pain like a lance which opens an imposthume.—With *meekness*, with a calm, unruffled, peaceful mind, that what you hear, may prove an “ingrafted word, able to save your soul.” Jam. i. 21. Above all, hear with a fixed *resolution*, formed in the strength of grace to be a “doer of the word and not a hearer only,” to practice all you hear, as far as you see it to be agreeable to the word and will of God.

NONCONFORMITY TO THE WORLD.

Romans xii. 2.—And be not conformed to this world. (Sk.)

THE christians at Rome, to whom St. Paul dedicated this epistle, had made considerable improvement in religion, and obtained great celebrity in their profession; they were the *beloved of God*, and their faith was *spoken of throughout the whole world*. To seek renown for personal beauty, or some exterior embellishment, is the genuine offspring of worldly vanity; but to be emulous to approve ourselves unto God, and obtain the *honor of all his saints*, is a principle which religion only inspires, and christians only enjoy. St. Paul had never seen the Roman in the flesh, but as he had the care of all the churches, he mentioned them always in his prayers—had often purposed to visit them; and to evince how deeply he was interested in their welfare, he sent them this epistle, which contains not only a statement of the sublime doctrines of christianity, but a clear view of experimental and practical godliness, together with the most affectionate exhortations to excite them to duty. St. Paul had *no dominion over their faith*, and therefore he begins his chapter thus, “I beseech you,” &c, verse 1. The text is a part of this request, and therefore we will endeavor to show,

I. THE NATURE OF THAT CONFORMITY TO THE WORLD WHICH THE TEXT PROHIBITS. By the phrase *this world*, we understand the ungodly part of mankind, all unregenerate persons, whether openly profane, or pharisaically moral. They are thus denominated either to show that worldly objects engross all their attention, or else to distinguish them from those who are not of this world, John xvii. 14. The prohibition against conformity to *this world*, is not to be understood absolutely, or practiced rigorously; it is not *ceremonial*, consisting in “meats or drinks,” or external forms and habits; nor is it *civil*, leading us to abandon all intercourse with the world; to retire from the

haunts of men, and shut ourselves up in cloisters or nunneries. No; christians are to be the lights of the world; and they must go where their light will shine to the best advantage; they are the salt of the earth, and the salt must be diffused to preserve the mass from putrefaction. But the conformity here prohibited is *moral*, and may be reduced to the following points.

1. Be not conformed to the spirit and temper of the world; live not under the influence of carnal dispositions or ungodly tempers: what these are, the scriptures clearly state, Mark vii. 21—23; Gal. v. 19—21. Such are the genuine fruits produced by that “root that beareth gall and wormwood,” and such the corrupt streams that flow from the impure fountain of the human heart.

2. Be not conformed to this world in the maxims by which you are governed, or the rules by which you are directed. The miser has his maxims of worldly prudence and carnal policy; the hero has his maxims of worldly honor; the pleasure-taker has his maxims of carnal gratification. Remember your actions are not to be directed by such rules, nor your characters formed by such models; if you study worldly maxims, it should be with a design to perceive their inconsistency with those rules you profess to follow.

3. Be not conformed to this world in your company. As men of business, you may and must resort to marts of trade and places of public merchandise, and as mechanics or husbandmen, you may be obliged to labor for the bread that perisheth, in company with the men of this world. But form no unnecessary alliance with them, make no choice of them for your companions, 2 Cor. vi. 17, 18; Eph. v. 11; James iv. 4, and,

4. Most of all, be not conformed to this world in your practices; all such as are inconsistent with your allegiance to God, your duty to your neighbor, and love to yourselves.

II. ASSIGN SOME REASONS FOR ITS PROHIBITION.

1. *Duty prohibits it.* The text is the voice of God, it is the expression of his will. The same sovereign power that said “thou shalt do no murder,” said “be not conformed to this world.” You owe your all to God, his you are, and his will you are bound to obey; but by conformity to this world, you run counter to his will, and as much as lieth in you thwart his designs.

2. *Profession prohibits it.* The vows of God are upon you; your baptismal engagements bind you to renounce the pomps and vanities of this wicked world, &c. By the profession of christianity, you tacitly acknowledge that you are aiming to be like Christ; and how far he was from conforming to this world, the writings of the four evangelists sufficiently attest, John viii. 23, xviii. 36. By profession you engage to imitate the saints, and the stripes and tortures they endured from the world are indisputable evidences that conformity to *this world* was not their crime.

3. *Self-love prohibits it.* This is not such a world as we may safely imitate; it is a theatre of folly, a stage of vice, one great aceldama of blood and cruelty. The world lieth in wickedness; it is not merely sunk in the gulfs of wickedness, but lies there contentedly buried in sin, like the earth in the universal deluge; and by conforming to this world you take the most direct steps to plunge yourself into that condemnation which will be the portion of the ungodly.

4. *The love of your neighbor prohibits it.* By conforming to this world, you countenance crime, and strengthen the cause of wickedness; you give it settlement, succession, and perpetuity; you embolden others to sin, and

as sin and misery go together, you swell the aggregate of human woe, and people the regions of the damned.

5 *The interests of religion prohibit it.* By conforming to this world you stab your own peace, and wound your own conscience; you grieve the Spirit of God; you cause the friends of Zion to mourn: you turn the lame out of the way, and make the enemies of christianity triumph.

III. HOW MAY THIS CONFORMITY BE PREVENTED?

1. *By the regeneration of our natures;* read the close of the verse. This is a divine work, but prayer will secure the agency of that Being who effects it, John iii. 6; Matt. vi. 11.

2. *By the exercise of devout meditation* and daily prayer.

3. *By guarding against temptation,* keeping out of its way, being "all eye, all ear, all watchfulness."

4. *Above all, by a constant dependance on God.*

Conclusion.—1. The spirit of christianity is a totally distinct thing from the spirit of the world. 2. Our living in the world is no argument why we should be like the world; see Lot, Noah, Daniel, &c. 3. The charge of singularity should never frighten us from our duty. Let us not be fools for the sake of avoiding being called such, nor be damned for the sake of company.

AN ADDRESS TO THE FALLEN.

Rev. n. 5.—Remember from whence thou art fallen, and repent, and do the first works; or else I will come unto thee quickly, and will remove thy candle-stick out of his place, except thou repent. (Sk.)

THESE words are a part of an epistle which was dictated by the Lord Jesus Christ, and addressed by the apostle John to the church of Ephesus; a church that had been formed by the apostles themselves, and that had advanced to a state of eminence under their particular inspection. See Acts xviii. 19—21, and xix. and xx. 16—38, and epistle to the Ephesians. Favored as this church had been, it became necessary, about forty years after its establishment, to address its minister and its members in the language which you have heard.

Falling from God has ever been man's prevalent fault;—in almost every part of the sacred volume we find cautions, admonitions, or threatenings respecting it;—our text refers to this evil.—it is an address to the *fallen*;—and from it we are led—to consider their fall, and the means by which they may rise again.

I. THEIR FALL. The word *fall* is striking; it is that which is so frequently used to express man's first departure from God. In the text it is synonymous with the various expressions used by the sacred writers, to signify declension from God and his ways. Our departure from God may, in its nature and in its degree, be different. Let us therefore rather take a general view of the subject, than confine our ideas to the particular fault charged on this church, (in verse 4;) and rather connect our ideas with individuals, than refer them to whole communities; not forgetting that what describes the state of a fallen individual, may illustrate the condition of a fallen church.

It is a fall—from the favor and the approbation of God;—where the soul lived under the smiles of the divine countenance; into a state of guilt and condemnation. Compare Psalms xxvii. and li.

From the image of God;—where knowledge, righteousness, and holiness adorned the mind, and rendered it peaceful and happy, into a state of inward depravity; where evil principles—unholy passions—sinful dispositions—and bad tempers again darken, disturb and torment the soul.

From the love of God;—where the best the strongest affections of the soul, were turned towards, and fixed on the greatest and best of beings; into a state, where all these are drawn towards, and fixed on, the degraded creature, and the perishing world.

From a state of vigor, and holy zeal in the cause of God;—where faith was active, love was warm, prayer and praise were fervent, and where efforts to do good were strong and constant: into a state of religious supineness; where the soul is no longer vigorous towards God; and where forms, sounds, and cold wishes, are substituted for prayer, praise and holy zeal.

It is frequently a fall from rectitude of heart and life, into the practice of immorality.

From having enjoyed the approbation, the respect, the love of the church, such persons become, to the people of God, mere objects of commiseration.

Oh, what a fall! They were ascending toward heaven: but see! they now descend towards hell.

Such a sight may gratify fiends. Bad men may say—"so would we have it." But over such the pious mourn; and the gracious, the merciful God speaks to such in the language of paternal compassion, Hos. xi. 8; and in our text, Jesus, who would raise them again, addresses them thus, "Remember," &c.

Fallen as they are, they need not perish. Oh, that they may take heed to the things which they hear! and from the following part of the subject, may they understand, and by the grace of God, use,

II. THE MEANS BY WHICH THEY MAY RISE AGAIN!

"Remember—from whence thou art fallen." Strange as it may be, the fallen do forget, or seem to forget, their former situation. Sin dreadfully deceives and hardens. See 2 Sam. xii. 1—7; Heb. iii. 7—14; Rev. iii. 17. But it is essential to the rise of any fallen professor, that he remember from whence he hath fallen; without this he can have no proper view of the nature and the extent of his fault.

Remember,—poor, fallen soul!—thou once wast a child of God, and couldst call God thy father. Thou didst live in a state of favor, of union, and of intimacy with thy God and Saviour.—Thou wast humble, patient, meek, happy, loving, and beloved. Thy soul did aspire heavenward; and standing as on an eminence, thou couldst look down on created good, as perishable, trifling, diminutive, and mean; and turning thine eyes upward, by faith thou couldst almost behold the glory of heaven; while holy meditation, and spiritual desire really carried thee beyond the present life. Or, suppose that thou didst not rise quite so high;—hast thou not left so much of what was great and good, that thy soul is filled with sorrow and regret for that which thou hast lost? Dost thou not say, "Oh that it were with me as in days that are past!" We rejoice that thou art made thus sensible of thy present circumstances.—Now, take the following advice.

Repent—of thy fall: Falling is in itself a great sin, Jer. ii. 19. Repent, on account of the injury that thy fall hath done to thyself, to the people of God, to the cause of God. Repent sincerely and deeply. Read the fifty-

first Psalm, and understand what deep and sincere repentance is. Many returning backsliders seem not to be affected, as they should be, on account of their fall. When fallen, there is no rising again without repentance.

"Do thy first works." Leave off thy sins; break from thy sinful associates. Have recourse to prayer, especially to private prayer. Use diligently the means of grace. Above all, go to Christ, the only Saviour, as thou didst first go. Cry mightily for salvation. Believe, again believe on the son of God. *Renew thy former zeal.*

Oh! how difficult it is to acknowledge the depth of one's fall;—to begin anew. How many never effectually rise again, because they *will* be viewed as though they had never fallen.

The above advice is urged by the following awful threat;—

"Or else I will come." Such an intimation is always very weighty. See Luke xx. 19; Rev. xxii. 12.

"I will come—quickly." Though the Lord Jesus is long suffering, having given time for repentance, and that time being nearly expired, he will *quickly* come. See ver. 21, 22; Isa. i. 5; Prov. xxix. 1.

"I will remove thy candlestick out of his place, except thou repent;" see chap. i. 12, 20, and ver. 1. I will withdraw divine light, divine influence, and leave the fallen church in its degraded state; so that a lifeless ministry, and lifeless forms, shall be followed by darkness, and by death. See Isa. v. 5, 6. A threat long since executed on the Ephesian church:—a threat that will ere long be put in force against thee, poor fallen professor, "except thou repent." *O that thou mayest awake, and call upon God, that thou perish not!*

What a lesson is our text, for fallen professors, and for fallen churches!

But who are so backward to learn, as those that are thus fallen? The reason is obvious. See chap. iii. 17.

Yet the *fallen* are the most pitiable objects of commiseration in the world.

FOLLOWING THE MULTITUDE PROHIBITED.

Exodus xxiii. 2.—Thou shalt not follow a multitude to do evil. (Sk.)

WHATEVER was written aforetime was written for our instruction. But the most important parts of divine revelation, and those with which we ought to be most intimately acquainted, are the precepts; which comprise the whole of a man's duty, and delineate with a critical exactness, a moral map of the road which he has to travel. The precepts of the Bible are of two kinds; those which positively illustrate what we are obligated to do, and those which negatively describe what we are to leave undone: the text is of the latter description, which, though found in the Old Testament, and among the code of laws which God gave to the Jews, is not of less importance to us than it was to them; we will therefore, in endeavoring to profit by it,

I. OFFER A FEW THOUGHTS FOR THE PURPOSE OF EXPLAINING ITS NATURE

II. URGE REASONS TO INDUCE US TO OBSERVE IT.

III. IMPART ADVICE FOR THE DIRECTION OF THOSE WHO WISH TO ESCAPE THE ENSNARING WILES OF THE MULTITUDE.

In explaining the text, there are two general observations which we have to make. First, something assumed. Secondly, something implied. It is assumed that the multitude do evil: it is implied that we are in danger of copying their example. First, *The multitude do evil.* Evil, is either moral or natural;—sin, or its consequences. The former is to be understood here; this is the most common import of the term, Gen. vi. 5; Isa. i. 16; Rom. xii. 9. That the multitude do evil, may be inferred, 1. *From the review of past ages.* Look at the example of the old world, when all flesh had corrupted its way; at Sodom and Gomorrah, when ten righteous persons could not be found amidst that vast population. God, indeed, in after ages, chose a people for himself, but even in reference to these, Isaiah said, "Except the Lord of Hosts had left unto us a very small remnant, we should have been as Sodom," Isa. i. 9. And if iniquity abounded among a people so highly distinguished, what could be expected from heathen nations, who were involved in the deepest darkness, and corrupted by the vilest idolatries? 2. *From the cruel persecutions which have been raised against the righteous in various ages of the world.* What these were in ancient times we learn from Heb. xi. 35—38. But why have the people of God been thus persecuted? because the multitude do evil. The reason why Cain slew his brother was, his works were evil, and his brother's righteous; and the prevalence of persecution has been a standing evidence of the truth we attempt to establish. 3. *From the common conduct of mankind.* Is not vice more general than virtue? Does not evil abound more than good? Is not the world followed with more avidity than religion? See how plays, and amusements, are sought after; what oaths are sworn, what lies are told, what thefts are committed, and what abominations are practiced?

Secondly, The precept in the text suppose, that *we are in danger of copying the example of the multitude.* We may infer this, 1. *From the innate tendencies which we have to evil.* The "imagination of man's heart is evil;" evil has its seat there; and if the fountain be evil will not the stream be evil? Look at little children, who have not been corrupted by the manners of the multitude, yet what tendencies to evil are evinced, and dispositions to evil displayed in their conduct! 2. *From the prevalence of bad example.* Man is an imitative creature, and easily prevailed upon to imbibe the spirit, and copy the example of those with whom he may associate, and especially, when that example is in unison with his inclinations: hence we are not only disposed to evil, but have facilities to the practice of evil; we are like disordered people in a hospital, surrounded by the dying and the dead, breathing the very atmosphere of disease, putrescence, and death. The practice of the multitude renders vice familiar to our thoughts, and gradually wears off the abhorrence with which we once beheld it. 3. *From a variety of melancholy facts.* The multitude who now do evil, were not always such adepts in depravity; when they first entered into the broad way, their feet were not swift to do evil; they proceeded with hesitating steps, for none become completely wicked on a sudden, but by practice they became hardened in their crimes, and like the wicked whom they followed

II. URGE REASONS TO INDUCE US TO OBSERVE IT.

The multitude doing evil are represented as guides, which men are accustomed to follow; but the reasons why we should not imitate them, are, 1. *They are unlawful and unconstituted guides.* The text itself sufficiently proves this. "Thou shalt not follow," &c. This is God's positive injunction to thee; it is personal, and absolute; and wilt thou not revere His authority? God's will is law, and should be regarded as an invariable rule

of action; and to "follow a multitude," &c., is to act in direct opposition to God.

2. *They are bad guides.* The principles by which they are actuated are vile, vicious, and ungodly principles: pride, anger, malice, revenge, and all the bad passions that infest the mind: the practices they pursue are bad practices; the way they travel is a bad way. By following "a multitude to do evil," you will become like them, and by yielding to the current of vice, you render that current stronger, for carrying forward others to ruin.

3. *They are dishonorable guides.* For the credit of your characters, you ought not to follow "a multitude," &c. In all ages, the most honorable men have been those who have dared to be singular, and stood aloof from the degenerate crowd, unterrified by their frowns, and untempted by their smiles. Follow a multitude to do evil, and you will dishonor your character, stain your reputation, and involve yourselves in eternal disgrace.

4. *They are unprofitable guides.* "What fruit had you in those things whereof ye are now ashamed?" Evil is a most unprofitable concern, Isa. xlviii. 22. We seldom embark in any enterprise without an eye to profit, but here you may calculate with moral certainty upon the loss of all that is valuable and profitable, for time and eternity.

5. *They are dangerous guides.* We all believe that there is a dreadful hell, a place and state of insufferable pain and punishment; and every evil doer is preparing himself for that punishment; treasuring up wrath against the day of wrath; his steps are taking hold on hell, and he is going down to the chambers of death. By following a multitude to do evil, you endanger your souls, and accelerate your ruin.

III. IMPART ADVICE FOR THE DIRECTION OF THOSE WHO WISH TO ESCAPE THE ENSNARING WILES OF THE MULTITUDE.

1. *Get your minds deeply and thoroughly impressed with the awfulness of your situation.* Dangers unseen will be unavoidable. Consider your ways; reflect on your past conduct; converse with your own hearts; thoughtlessness is one of the greatest evils in existence, and nothing is more common. Without consideration, you will be irresistibly captivated to do evil.

2. *Seek the regenerating grace of God.* Our carnal natures are wholly inclined to evil; "that which is born of the flesh, is flesh."—Oh! pray for the renewing influence of the Holy Ghost. The Ethiopian may as well attempt to change his skin, or the leopard his spots, as you can cease from doing evil without a change of heart.

3. *Be on your guard against the seductive wiles, and insinuating influence of the multitude.* Sinners will entice you; but come out from among them; have no communion with the unfruitful works of darkness, Ps. i. 1.

4. *Follow the happy few who strive to do good.* The church and the world form two societies, acting in direct opposition to each other; in one of these societies you *must* be; there is no standing neuter. On one side, be your allegiance, your honor, and your interest; on the other, your guilt, your shame, and your punishment. Can you hesitate for a moment where to take your stand? He that is not with Christ, is against him. Show that you are with Christ by being with his people. Oh, say, "This people shall be my people, and their God my God."—

INFER,

1. That the measures of right and wrong are not to be determined by the majority. Good and evil are fixed immutable principles; and their natures are unchangeable, whether many or few follow them.

2. What gratitude is due to God, for the revelation of his will, which marks the boundaries of right and wrong; and for the gift of his Son to redeem us from this present evil world: to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen.

THE REDEEMER'S COMPLAINT.

John v. 40.—And ye will not come unto me that ye may have life. (Sk.)

WHEN we seriously contemplate a future state of existence, we are overpowered by the magnitude and awful grandeur of the important objects it presents. When in imagination we launch forth from the shore of time, into a boundless of eternity, we feel our need of some one, who shall be constantly present with us, to afford us support, and to make us happy. But to whom shall we turn? Our fellow men are as destitute and feeble as ourselves. Nor is there any being who can meet our necessities, but that God whose potent arm sustains the keys of death, and the invisible world. Against him we have sinned; and can we hope for so much favor at his hands? His word reveals him gracious and merciful. He has given his Son to be our Redeemer. Our Redeemer has procured for us all we need. He offers us what he has procured, “without money and without price;” and even complains “ye will not come unto me, that ye might have life.” This complaint suggests several important considerations. Herein,

I. WE HAVE OUR NATURAL STATE EVIDENTLY IMPLIED;—the opposite of ‘life;’—a state of DEATH. This representation is frequently made by the scripture writers, who uniformly speak of the unregenerate, as being “*dead* in trespasses and sins.” The representation applies,

1. To the sinner’s *judicial state*. We are under the law to God, our rightful sovereign;—have broken his law by open rebellion, as well as by omissions of duty; of course, we are subject to the penalty which the law denounces; and that penalty is *death*. “The soul that sinneth shall die.” Thus a condemned criminal, who has forfeited his life to justice, and now waits the time of execution, is *dead in law*. Hence ministers are said to be “the savor of death unto death;”—and the law is denominated the “ministration of *death* and of *condemnation*,” 2 Cor. ii. 16, and iii. 7—9. The term death, applies,

2. To the sinner’s *spiritual state*. Accordingly the apostle says, “you hath he *quickened*, who were dead,” &c, Eph. ii. 1—5. Here we find several points of agreement between a state of death, and that which it is employed to represent. We select two;—death is a state of *insensibility*, and *inaction*. A corpse is *insensible* to any *insult* or *indignity* that may be offered to it;—would be insensible if in the midst of a *conflagration*, nor does it feel any honors done it, or intended to be done. So a person spiritually dead, feels not the *vile insult* which satan, the “father of lies,” and the *most deeply fallen*, offers to both his *understanding* and his heart, when he employs him in his *dirty* and *degrading* drudgery. He is insensible of his *danger* of that hell on the breaking brink of which he totters:—and of his *privileges* as a ransomed son of Adam, and the happiness and honor to which he is invited, both *here* and *hereafter*. He neither feels

shame and regret for his base rebellion, nor *love* and *gratitude* for what Jesus has done and suffered on his account. A corpse is totally *inactive*;—so the dead sinner makes no effort to escape misery, or to secure eternal bliss.

3. The word “death” applies remotely to the *eternal state* of the finally impenitent;—“the second death,—everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord,” Rev. xx. 6, and xxi. 8; 2 Thess. i. 7—9. But,

II. WE ARE POINTED TO THE SOURCE OF LIFE. “Ye will not come to me.”

1. Jesus is the source of *legal life*;—of that pardon or justification, by which the sinner’s sentence is reversed. “By him, all that believe are *justified from all things*,” Acts xiii. 38, 39. “There is now no *condemnation*,” for “he was wounded *for our transgressions*,”—“died *for us*,”—“suffered, the just *for the unjust*,” therefore, “by his obedience many shall be *made righteous*.” See also Acts xxvi. 18; Eph. i. 7; Col. i. 14.

2. He is the source of *spiritual life*. “I am the *vine*, ye are the *branches*.” From him believers derive their *vitality*, their *feeling*, their *vigor*, their *fruitfulness* in good works. Hence the apostle, in one place says, “I live: yet not I; but *Christ liveth in me*,” and in another, reminds the pious christian, that when Christ, who *is our life*, shall appear, he also shall appear with him in glory,” Gal. ii. 20; Col. iii. 3, 4. From this, it follows, that,

3. He is the source of *eternal life*. “Though he were as a Son, yet learned he obedience by the things which he suffered; and being made perfect, he became the *author of eternal salvation* unto all them that obey him, Heb. v. 8, 9. He *purchased* life eternal, John iii. 14, 15; Rom. v. 1, 2. He *teaches the way* to it, John vi. 68. He, by his Spirit, *qualifies* for it, Rom. viii. 9; John xvii. 3; 2 Cor. v. 17. He will *dispense* it, John x. 27, 28; Matt. xxv. 31—46. In our text,

III. WE ARE INSTRUCTED HOW TO OBTAIN THE LIFE WE NEED. “Ye will not *come unto me*.” The “coming,” thus recommended, implies,

1. *A change of situation*. The sinner, who was “*alienated*,” and “*far off*,” now *forsakes* his way of wickedness—*approaches* the Saviour; “*draws nigh*” unto God through him; and takes his station within the pale of the church, Prov. xv. 29; Col. i. 21; Eph. ii. 13.

2. It implies, also, *a change of object*. Formerly, he looked for *happiness*, to wealth, honor, worldly connections, &c.; and for *salvation*, to a poor Pharisaic righteousness of his own; but now, for both happiness here, and salvation hereafter, he is found “looking unto Jesus,” Phil. iii. 7—9. Coming to Jesus may perhaps, require,

3. *A change of company*. If your companions will accompany you, well. If not, you must come out from among them. and be separate, 2 Cor. vi. 17. On the other hand, if we wanted to obtain an interview with an earthly prince, from whom we hoped for such favors as none but himself could bestow, we should most gladly avail ourselves of the company and advice of persons who had, in *circumstances similar* to ours, *sought*, and *found admittance* to his presence, and had *presented* their *petition*, and been *graciously accepted*. Apply this thought; and avail yourselves of the *experience* and *assistance* of those who have already come to Jesus, and found him able and willing to save, and who now say, “Come thou with us; and we will do thee good,” &c. This coming also supposes,

4. *Confidence* in the Redeemer’s power and goodness.

5. *Earnest desire* of obtaining his salvation; and, consequently, a *readiness* to make *every sacrifice*, and to use *every necessary means* in order to obtain it. From our text,

IV. WE LEARN WHAT IS THE IMMEDIATE CAUSE OF MAN'S ETERNAL DESTRUCTION;—"Ye WILL not come unto me." Concerning the freedom of the human will, there have been endless disputes. This is not a time and place to enter at length into the controversy; yet we may offer a few remarks.

1. It is a settled point, that no man can come to Jesus, except the Father draw him, John vi. 44.

2. The question, therefore, is not whether a person may become converted without God's grace; but whether he may not so *reject* the counsel of God against himself, Luke vii. 30, and *resist* the Holy Ghost Acts vii. 51, as to *frustrate* the grace of God? Gal. ii. 21.

3. In answer to this, it may be said, that the language of our text is that of *reproof*. Now, reproof supposes, that the reprov'd could have acted otherwise, and better than they have done: if they could not, then the blame rests, and the reproof should also rest, somewhere else. But,

4. This point is more fully determined, by Matt. xxiii. 37. "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, how often *would* I have gathered thy children together, and *ye would not*."

5. On this principle, God "is justified in his sayings;" and exonerated from the charge and suspicion of being the author of sin; while man appears to be wholly chargeable with both that, and his own perdition.

Lastly, On this principle, and, indeed, even on the opposite one, every sincerely seeking soul may derive from the text the greatest encouragement. If you *will* come, you have free liberty and pressing invitation to do so; "Ho, *every one that thirsteth*, come ye to the waters." Isa. lv. 1. "The spirit and the bride say, come. And let him that heareth say, come. And let him that is athirst, come. And *whosoever will*, let him take the water of life freely," Rev. xxii. 17.

THE JUDGMENT.

Romans xiv. 10.—We shall all stand before the judgment seat of Christ. (P.)

Our church, during the present season of advent, commemorates our Lord Jesus Christ's first coming "in great humility," to "give his life a ransom" for sinners; and I know not how to improve the present occasion better, than by directing your attention to his second advent, when He will come to be "glorified in his saints"—to be admired by all—and to pass the final and irrevocable sentence upon the whole family of man. To that awful time, the words of the text apply.—"For we must all stand before the judgment seat of Christ. Lend me then your prayerful attention, whilst I consider,

I. THE CHARACTER OF THE JUDGE.

II. THE PERSONS TO BE JUDGED

III. THE EVIDENCE AND PROCESS BY WHICH THE JUDGMENT WILL BE CONDUCTED. And,

IV. THE SENTENCE ITSELF.

I. THE CHARACTER OF THE JUDGE.

And here I would have every one bear in mind, that what we here say are not matters of trifling import, nor are they idle chimeras as some would have them; neither are they the mere inventions of man; but the verities of God's word: they are of eternal importance. The scene here portrayed, is one in which we must all bear a part; in which the preacher before you must answer for a large share of responsibility committed to his charge, and you, his hearers, for what you hear.

Who will preside on the occasion?—The Lord Jesus Christ—the Son of God—the Son of God in our nature—our “elder Brother,” who came into the world to accomplish our redemption,—who took our nature upon him, and “gave his life a ransom for our sins.”

We are informed by himself, that all judgment is committed to him,—“The Father judgeth no man, but hath committed all judgment to the Son.” The same is the doctrine of the text,—“For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ.” Our Saviour says, “When the Son of man shall come in his glory, and all his holy angels with him, then shall He sit on the throne of his glory—Matt. xxv. 31. And an inspired Apostle bears his testimony to this point, Acts xvii. 31. St. John says, in the close of the Apocalyptic vision, referring to the glorious appearance of the Son of God from heaven, Rev. xi. and xx.

Here we behold the Redeemer on his throne of glory, a throne which never had been sullied by impurity or wrong, but of which it may truly be said, “Righteousness and judgment are the habitation of his throne.”—There will be no place for sin after this solemn day, “For the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat;” the glittering stars rush from their orbits, and all created matter be consumed.—

“And like the baseless fabric of a vision,
Leave not a wreck behind.”

“Behold he cometh with clouds, and every eye shall see him, and they also which pierced him, and all the kindreds of the earth shall wail because of him.”

What a wonderful change will then take place! No longer we behold him the “man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief;” his sufferings are over—the days of his humiliation past—the atoning blood has ceased to flow—he no longer stands a captive at Pilate's bar; but now comes to pass sentence on Pilate himself. Then shall we see him “robed in dreadful majesty,” making the “clouds his chariots,” and riding upon the “wings of the wind.”

Then let the Jews repeat their cry, “Crucify him, crucify him,”—let them bow the deriding knee before him and say, “If thou be the Son of God, come down from the cross.”—Let the sensualist, and the scoffer at religion, come and meet their Judge—let the hypocritical professor of an holy and spiritual religion tell his idle creed, and show his piety;—his heart fails him—he now first discovers religion to be a reality, and essential to the welfare of man, and comes from God—he will now be convinced that the Son of God was what he professed to be, “God blessed for ever.”

We notice,

II. THE PERSONS TO BE JUDGED.

The text says *all*. That Almighty Being, who first created all things by his power, now collects the scattered atoms of his creatures, that body and spirit may re-unite. The Apostle says, “For we must *all* appear before the judgment seat of Christ.” What an assembly will that be!

Europeans and Asiatics, the swarthy sons of Africa, and the scattered tribes of America; the Jew, Turk, Pagan, Infidel, and Christian, will then stand on one common basis, and be judged according to the light which each has possessed, or the dispensation under which he has been privileged to live.—And each for himself, give “account of the deeds done in the body, whether they are good or bad.”

In this assembly, we must all bear a part, and take our place; here all distinction but one solitary one, must for ever cease.

Let me, my brethren, call upon you here, to enquire what would be *your* feelings were you at this moment called upon to approach your God?

There is but one way for sinners, by which this dreadful disclosure may be avoided—by which those sins can be washed away; and that is by *now* fleeing to your Saviour, by covering them with his blood; otherwise you must eternally perish

Throw down then, I beseech you, the “arms of your rebellion”—turn to the Redeemer, who came “to seek and to save that which was lost,” “Through Him, all your iniquities shall be blotted out,” of the book of God’s remembrance, and “be cast into the depths of the sea.”

III. THE EVIDENCE AND PROCESS BY WHICH THE JUDGMENT WILL BE CONDUCTED.

“I saw the dead, small and great, stand before God; and the books were opened.” The language is figurative, but plain. We are not to suppose that God, to whom the past, present, and future are alike, will require records or remembrances;—all things are open to him. But here he stoops to the capacities of our nature, and speaks “after the manner of men,” according to the proceedings in earthly courts, where books are kept and evidences heard. At that awful day, many books will be opened. Time will not allow me to enlarge much on the subject, I will name but a few,

1. The book of *providence* will be clearly opened, and its mysteries explained.

2. The book of the *Moral Law*, and God’s dealings towards all his intelligent creatures.

Such an one is not to be found. All have not received the gospel of Christ, and full salvation is alone revealed through that gospel. According to the privileges you have enjoyed, will your comparative guilt be weighed; and the wicked be eternally condemned.

The law demands perfect love to God and man;—consider what the law requires.

3. The book of *the scriptures*. God has given to the world these “treasures of wisdom and of knowledge,” their object is to direct the sinner to the Saviour, to reveal a full and free salvation to all; none are excluded from its offers, all are invited to “throw down the arms of their rebellion,” to believe and be saved.

4. The book of *conscience*. Conscience is a principle implanted in the mind, and is emphatically called “the Vicegerent of God.”

IV. THE SENTENCE TO BE PRONOUNCED. The sentence will be short but decisive, and tremendous in its consequences. See Matt. xxv. and realize in your minds the scene before you.

The sentence is as decisive as it is awful.

Having now considered the subject before us, let me offer one or two remarks by way of application; and,

1. The supreme importance of an interest in Christ.

2. The vast importance of good works, Matt. xxv. 41—45.

CHAPTER VII.

THE CONSEQUENCES OF SIN.

THE EVIL OF SIN.

Jeremiah ii. 19.—Know therefore and see, that it is an evil thing and bitter, that thou hast forsaken the Lord thy God, and that my fear is not in thee, saith the Lord God of hosts. (Pr.)

SIN has not only entered into the world, but is become universal. Every individual is the subject of it, every heart is tainted with it. Had it been otherwise, we should have been more sensible of its evil nature, and more shocked at its deformity. But seeing all are alike diseased, it is but little thought of, and we are not sufficiently aware of its evil tendency. And though it is universal, yet if we obtain not a cure, its malignity will prove no less fatal on that account.

I. ENQUIRE WHEREIN SIN CONSISTS, ACCORDING TO THE DESCRIPTION OF THE PROPHET.

It is here summed up in two things: “forsaking the Lord our God”—and “his fear not being in us.”— — —We may see the difference between man’s view of sin, and God’s view of it. Man regards the evil of sin chiefly as it consists in outward conduct, and as it affects himself or his own interest. But God traces it to its source, as originating in the disposition of our hearts towards him.

1. Every sinner has *forsaken* God.— — —He does not desire him as his portion, but other things in preference.— — —He is not mindful of his favor, nor thinks it worth seeking after; but esteems the friendship of a fellow creature more than his. Like a prodigal son, he has no love to his father, nor concern about his honor. Every sinner says in his heart, “No God.” He is nothing but enmity against him: the throne of heaven would not stand secure, if it depended on the sinner, whether God should reign or not. Such is the evil of having forsaken him.

2. As God is not loved, so *neither is he feared*, at least not in such a way as to depart from evil. “My fear is not in thee, saith the Lord God of hosts.”— — —Because he forbears, and sentence is not executed speedily, the hearts of the sons of men are set in them to do evil. No evil is avoided, merely out of regard to his authority, but from selfish motives only.

3. From these two sources proceed *all the evils that are in the world*. — — —Forsaking God has been the cause of every abomination: hence all the wars, oppression, and injustice, between nations and individuals.— — —From the same source also arises a rejection of Christ and the gospel; a contempt of religion, and of religious people.— — —Hence also that hardness, and indifference to the gospel, in many who attend upon it.— — —Hence the most solemn warnings and tender expostulations are without effect, and all the mercy of the Saviour is neglected and despised.

II. CONSIDER THE EVIL AND BITTER NATURE OF SIN.

On some accounts, it is very difficult for us properly to understand and feel this part of the subject. The subject itself is incomprehensible, and we are too much blinded by our own depravity to see the evil there is in it.

However, there are a few mediums by which we may form some idea of its magnitude.

1. We may “know and see how evil and bitter a thing sin is,” by th

precepts of God's holy law, which forbid it; and we must measure it by this rule to see what evil there is in it.— — —Men generally estimate the evil of sin by what is commonly esteemed in the world, or commonly practiced amongst men, and by what is allowed to be harmless and excusable.— — —But we must appeal to the law and to the testimony. The world is a poor judge of what is right, as well as of what is true: the word of God is the only criterion by which to judge. Rom. vii. 7.— — —What a pure and happy world would this be, if cemented by love. How much would it then resemble heaven.— — —how evil and how bitter is the reverse.

2. We may “know and see” *by the awful threatenings of God's word*, by which it stands condemned. Deut. xxviii. 15.— — —The Lawgiver of the world has connected punishment with every offense: and could a Being of infinite goodness curse the creatures he has made, if sin were not an evil of inconceivable magnitude! — — —Could a small evil raise such wrath, and kindle such a burning flame? God is displeased with nothing else but sin; and here his anger burns to the lowest hell.

3. We may know and see *by the bitter sorrows of true penitents*. — — —Oh what anguish of soul has it occasioned in those who have been brought to “know and see” its evil nature.— — —Hear the groans of David, see the tears of Peter, and the deep distress of many others. Psa. xxxviii. 1—6; li. 1—4; Zech. xii. 10.

4. Know by *the bitter fruits it has already produced*. — — —Great is the misery of man upon him; but sin is the cause of all.— — —What a catalogue of diseases, oppressions, hardships, and disappointments; the whole creation groaning under the load of human misery.— — —Yet all this is only some of the first effects of this evil and bitter thing.

5. By the still more bitter fruits *it would have produced*, if God had not restrained it.— — —Every city and town would then have been a Sodom. God's authority would be driven out of the world: all mankind would be hateful and hating one another.— — —But, with all that we see and know, we see not a thousandth part of the evil that would result, if God had not said to the waves of this mighty ocean, Hitherto shalt thou go, and no farther.

6. By the *bitter pains of eternal death*. There shall be weeping and wailing, and gnashing of teeth — — —the worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched — — —the smoke of their torment ascendeth up for ever and ever.— — —This is the hell of fire which sin has kindled.

7. Know it also by the *bitter sufferings of the Son of God* — — —What means that bloody sweat in the garden.— — —What is the meaning of those awful words upon the cross, “My God! My God! why hast thou forsaken me!” — — —But who can estimate the full evil of sin by this comparison: the Saviour in sorrow drowned, but not in sorrow lost!

III. ENFORCE THE EXHORTATION: “Know therefore and see that it is an evil and bitter thing.”

1. Unless we know and see this, we can *neither know nor see the salvation of God*. — — —This indeed is the reason why it is so little regarded: the whole need not a physician, but they that are sick.

2. Without a knowledge of the evil of sin, we shall *neither repent of it nor depart from it* to any good purpose. — — —It is only as we are impressed with this conviction that we can be kept from sinning against God, or be made to loathe ourselves in his sight.

3. If we know and see it not truly in this world, we shall be made to

know and see it to our cost in the world to come.— — — Sooner or later we must realise the nature and extent of this awful subject.

4. If we are brought to know and see it aright, *we shall come to Christ*; and herein will be the proof of our knowledge being in some measure what it ought to be. John vi. 45.

DREADFUL EFFECTS OF CARNALITY.

Romans viii. 6.—To be carnally minded is death. (Pr.)

WHILE the apostle exhibits in this chapter a brief view of the leading doctrines of the gospel, and the privileges of the godly, he is careful at the same time to show their holy nature, and practical effect.— — — If there be no condemnation, it is to those who “walk not after the flesh.”— — — If all things work together for good, it is to them that “love God.”— — — If the righteousness of the law is fulfilled in our justification, our sanctification is no less implied: and all carnality is inconsistent with the spirit and design of the gospel, yea, it is death itself.

That carnality has this tendency, may be seen in its effects. It destroys all activity for God, and so produces spiritual death. It fills the world with misery, and destroys all our hopes and happiness. It exposes us to the wrath to come, and so to death eternal.

Where carnality wholly prevails, it produces these effects totally: where it partially prevails, they exist in a partial degree.

1. CARNALITY, IN PROPORTION AS IT OPERATES, PRODUCES STUPIDITY, OR INACTIVITY FOR GOD.

1. The very *essence* of that spiritual death which pervades the heart of the unregenerate, consists in the prevalence of this carnality. To what else can we attribute insensibility under judgments— — — amidst so many mercies— — — unconcern about eternal things— — — unwillingness to come to Christ— — — living without God in the world.

2. Where carnality *partially* prevails it produces similar effects, only in a less degree. Its tendency is to render us inactive in holy duties, by weakening and destroying the principles of action: nothing can be done without it.

3. One of these principles is holy *love*: but carnality damps the sacred fire, cools and weakens our resolutions.

4. Another is *hope*: the hope of success in the Lord's service, and of heaven hereafter, is essential to holy activity. — — — But carnality beclouds our prospects, and hides the objects of hope from our view.

5. *Faith* is also a powerful spring of action: nothing makes us more alive to God than a realising view of invisible objects. Heb. xi. — — — But carnality weakens our hands, and destroys the energy of faith.

6. Conscious *integrity*, or walking before God, enlivens the christian in his course. Righteousness is the girdle of his reins, it strengthens him for action. — — — But carnality enervates the mind, produces pusillanimity, inaction and sloth.

7. Spiritual *joy* inspires the soul with courage, with holy ardor and delight in the ways of God. — — — But carnality is death: it weakens all the springs of action, and paralyzes the whole soul.

II CARNALITY, IN PROPORTION AS IT OPERATES, PRODUCES MISERY.

1. We need only consider the state of those who are *wholly* under the dominion of a carnal mind, and we shall see what are its effects.—— There we shall see men ever seeking after happiness, but never able to obtain it.——Men at war with themselves; conscience and inclination at perpetual variance; continual fear and suspense about futurity.——Every affliction gives alarm: they are afraid to know themselves, or their true state, or to think closely about the concerns of their souls. They are loaded with guilt, and are self-condemned.——Oh, to be carnally minded is death——worse than death.

2. Where this principle only *partially* prevails, it operates in the same, and produces similar effects.——Guilt and darkness, misery and death, are its natural consequences. It causes distance from God, unfits us for communion with him, and casts us out of his sight; and this is the essence of all other misery.

What peace could Jonah have, when he had disobeyed the commandment of the Lord. What happiness could David find, after he had killed Uriah with the sword.——Whither can we go for comfort, apostate from our God!

III. CARNALITY TENDS TO RUIN IN THE WORLD TO COME, AND TO DEATH ETERNAL.

Left to pursue its course, this would be its final issue. Rom. vi. 23; James i. 15.——Eternal death is the just desert of sin, its proper wages, its natural effect, and penal reward.——It is enmity with God: it says to him, Depart from us: and he will say, Depart ye cursed.

Eternal death is the privation of all good, the endurance of all evil.——Carnality leads to this: it rejects the only remedy, the only refuge, and plunges the soul into the gulf of perdition.

It has the same tendency wherever it exists, and in whatever degree——If the issue be not the same, it is because that tendency is counteracted. Like poison in the blood, its fatal effects may be prevented; but if it take its course, it will end in death.

How dangerous to seek relief from misery in carnal pleasures. They are bought at the hazard of the soul: the end of these things is death.

THE DIFFICULTY OF SALVATION A JUST GROUND OF APPREHENSION TO THE UNGODLY.

1 Pet. iv. 18.—If the righteous scarcely be saved, where shall the ungodly and the sinner appear? (S. S.)

EARNESTNESS in the concerns of religion is often thought unnecessary—
But the attainment of salvation is by no means easy—

This appears from the representations which the scriptures give of religion;—a race, a warfare, &c.

The difficulties implied in these metaphors may well alarm the careless—
With this view St. Peter suggests the awful query in the text—

I. HIS ASSUMPTION.

The apostle did not mean to express a doubt, but rather to assume a position which he deemed incontrovertible—

The point he assumes is, that the righteous are saved with difficulty.

The truth of this position will appear, if it be considered that the righteous are not saved without,

Deep afflictions.

God's people in all ages have been afflicted—Zeph. iii. 12.

They have much to endure on account of their religion—2 Tim. iii. 12.

But their trials are beneficial to them—1 Pet. i. 7.

They scarcely ever make any great proficiency without them—Ps cxix. 67.

They always in the issue acknowledge them as blessings—Ps. cxix. 71.

Severe conflicts.

The christian finds much opposition from without and from within—Eph vi. 12.

No attainments whatever put him without the reach of trials—

St. Paul, long after he had been caught up into the third heavens, felt the severest conflicts in his soul—Rom. vii. 15, 23.

They are more or less, the lot of every christian—Gal. v. 17.

And, though painful, they are necessary for us all—1 Pet. i. 6.

None can attain salvation without them, Heb. xii. 8; yet all find it extremely difficult to bear them without fainting—

Powerful assistances.

Nothing less than almighty power can uphold the christian—

This the most righteous men have freely acknowledged—Ps. cxix. 117.

Hence the preservation of the saints is ascribed to God alone—1 Pet. i. 5.

How mistaken then are they who think the attainment of salvation easy!—

Surely if the righteous find the way to heaven so difficult, the ungodly have reason to tremble for their state.

II. THE INFERENCE HE DRAWS FROM IT.

The different characters in the text are the same as those mentioned in the preceding verse—

The question respecting the latter implies that their destruction must be.

1. Certain.

This is constantly affirmed throughout the holy scriptures.

The ungodly shall appear at the judgment-seat of Christ—2 Cor. v. 10.

But they shall not be united with the righteous—Ps. i. 5.

They shall be separated from them for ever—Matt. xxv. 46.

It is deducible also from the foregoing assumption.

The righteous are justified by the blood of Christ, renewed by the Spirit of God, and are striving with all their might, &c.—

The ungodly are unpardoned, unsanctified, unimpressed—

It is impossible that these should have the same end—Isai. iii. 10, 11.

We will appeal to the ungodly themselves, and leave them to say, "where they shall appear?"—

The want also of many advantages for salvation is a further ground for it.

The righteous have sanctified afflictions, victorious conflicts, and all-sufficient assistances—

The ungodly remain unaltered by afflictions, unacquainted with spiritual conflicts, nor do they even seek God's assistance—

Surely if *those* be *scarcely* saved, *these* cannot be saved *at all*—

2. Dreadful.

St. Peter refers to the fiery trial of persecution in particular as rendering the christian's way to heaven so difficult—

He mentions it as permitted of God for the purging of his church—

He infers from it the dreadfulness of their destruction who oppose or reject the gospel—

This inference naturally follows—

If such be the *salutary purgations* of God's friends, what must be the *vindictive chastisements* of his enemies?

If such things come on his friends in this state of *probation*, what shall come on his enemies at the time appointed for final *retribution*?

If such be the visitations experienced by his friends *in the day of mercy*, what must his enemies expect *in the day of his wrath*?—

We may improve this subject,

1. For conviction.

Every one should inquire into his own character, state, and end*—

Let none rest till they can satisfy their consciences on scriptural grounds—

2. For consolation.

The difficulty of the salvation of the righteous implies however, that, though scarcely saved, they are saved at last—

This is a blessed and consolatory truth†—

Let all then under their difficulties commit themselves to God—1 Pet. iv. 19.

THE GREAT SIN OF REJECTING CHRIST.

John xv. 22.—If I had not come, and spoken unto them, they had not had sin: but now they have no cloak for their sin. (S. S.)

EVERY sin is committed against an infinitely good and gracious God—

Yet the stoical doctrine of the equality of sins is not therefore true—

Guilt may be aggravated or diminished by a variety of circumstances—

Hence our Lord denounced peculiar woe against Chorazin and Bethsaida—

To the same effect he speaks concerning the Jews in the text—

I. HOW GREATLY AGGRAVATED THE SIN OF THE JEWS WAS IN REJECTING CHRIST.

Sin admits of so many degrees of malignity, that one may be considered as no sin in comparison of another—

Not that any man can be absolutely without sin—1 John i. 8.

Nor is any man really excusable in the sight of God—Rom. i. 19—21.

But *comparatively* some may be said to "have no sin"—John ix. 41.

Thus it was with those whom our Lord spake—

If he had not come to them, they might have pleaded a want of the necessary means of salvation—

But our Lord's preaching rendered them wholly inexcusable—

* Am I righteous, that is, justified, sanctified, and striving for the heavenly prize? Am I improving afflictions, maintaining conflicts, and receiving assistances from God? Have I reason to hope that I shall appear at the right hand of the judge; or am I still unprepared to meet my God?

† John x. 28. This may be well illustrated by the narration of Paul's shipwreck, when all the crew, having been given to him, were, though with great difficulty, saved. Acts xxvii. 44.

They could not plead any want of
Instruction

Our Lord often spake in parables—

This was the means of inflicting judicial blindness on the proud—Luke

vii. 10.

But it was well calculated for the instruction of the humble—

Besides, he delivered many things in the simplest terms—

Evidence.

Our Lord wrought many and stupendous miracles—

He performed them by a touch, a word, and even at a distance—

His miracles were as benevolent as they were open and undeniable—

Those who wished to discredit them, imputed them to the agency of
satan—

Our Lord mentions them as aggravating the guilt of those who rejected
him—ver. 24.

Warning.

There was no want of fidelity on our Lord's part—

He warned the people in the plainest and most awful manner—John viii.

21, 24.

Encouragement.

Every one that thirsted for his benefits was invited by him—John vii.

37, 38.

He offered to give *spiritual* life to all who would come to him—ibid.

He promised also to crown them with eternal happiness and glory—John

xii. 26.

If *they* were thus without excuse, it becomes us to consider,

II. HOW MUCH MORE INEXCUSABLE WE ARE IF WE REJECT CHRIST.

Christ has come and preached to us by his word and ministers—

And many reject him after the example of the unbelieving Jews—

Though we be not avowed infidels, we *practically* reject Christ, when *we*
do not receive him for all the ends and purposes for which he was sent—

And if we do so, our guilt is peculiarly aggravated—

We have not any Jewish prejudices to encounter.

The Jews had received their law from God—

They had been accustomed to expect a temporal Messiah—

Yet they saw a man altogether destitute and despised—

And beheld the law of Moses superseded by a new religion—

His works indeed should have obviated all these difficulties—

But we have not these difficulties to contend with—

We profess that the gospel is from God—

We profess that Christ's kingdom is of a spiritual nature—

We profess that his cross is his own glory; and his church's hope—

We see the whole design of God unfolded.

The Jews had only partial and contracted views—

They could not reconcile many seeming contrarieties—

The disciples, even after Christ's resurrection, were at a loss to account
for the occurrences they had seen—Luke xxiv. 21.

But we behold the counsels of God completed—

The various prophecies are all accomplished—

The characters and offices of Christ are opened—

The great ends of his incarnation and death are effected—

The glory of God, as shining in his face, is fully displayed—

We have witnessed the success of the gospel.

Those to whom our Lord spake, saw his ministry despised—
 The great and learned of their nation rejected him—
 His followers were only a few, and those of the lowest class—
 But we have seen the "grain of mustard become a large tree"—
 The gospel has spread to the remotest corners of the earth—
 It has triumphed over the prejudices and passions, the interests and powers, of the world—

Its influence is yet daily exhibited before our eyes—

How heinous then must be our guilt if we reject him !

Surely our "sin must be of a crimson or a scarlet die"—

ADDRESS,

1. Those who make excuses for their neglect of Christ.

With what foolish and weak excuses do men deceive themselves*—

Surely God will not be deceived by these—

What cloak for your sin will you find when he shall call you to account?—

Will you plead a want of instruction, evidence, warning, or encouragement?—

Know that in that day you will be speechless—Matt. xxii. 12.

Your love of sin and hatred of the light are the true causes of your rejecting Christ—John v. 40.

And this will be the ground of a more aggravated condemnation—John iii. 19.

2. Those who desire to attain the saving knowledge of him.

It is a great mercy to have such a desire formed in the heart—

But beware of cloaking or extenuating your sin—

Remember that awful yet encouraging declaration—Prov. xxviii. 13.

Confess your sin with all its aggravations—

There is a virtue in the blood of Jesus to cleanse you from it all—1 John i. 7.

THE SIN AND FOLLY OF GRIEVING THE HOLY SPIRIT.

Eph. iv. 30.—Grieve not the Holy Spirit of God, whereby ye are sealed unto the day of redemption. (B.)

THIS is one of the most necessary cautions, and most comprehensive and useful directions to be found in the oracles of God. None are of more general utility, or more needful to be inculcated and regarded. For all our saving knowledge in divine things, our holiness and happiness, depend on the Spirit of God, and a proper conduct towards him. The subject therefore is of the deepest importance, and deserves our most serious consideration. To set it in a just point of view, consider we,

* We may notice a few: "I have not time." For what is time given?—"I am not able." Do you do what you can?—"It is time enough yet." Shall you certainly live, and have the grace you now slight offered you again?—"I have the majority on my side." Are you not then in the broad road? and will associates mitigate your pain?—"Professors are hypocrites." Is that a reason you should not be sincere?—"God is merciful." To whom? the impenitent!

I. WHAT IS HERE MEANT BY THE "HOLY SPIRIT OF G'D," AND HOW HE SEALS US TO THE DAY OF REDEMPTION

By "the Holy Spirit of God," here, is meant that divine person or principle, to which every thing excellent is ascribed in scripture, or to his influence or inspiration.—All the life and motion in the universe, Gen. i. 2; particularly vegetable, animal, rational, and spiritual life.—Skill in arts, Exod. xxxi. 3.—Especially every gift, truly and durably good, and perfective of our nature, as illumination, the scriptures themselves, and the true knowledge of them, and of divine things, 1 Cor. ii. 11—14; Eph. i. 17; regeneration, John iii. 5, 6; including awakening, conviction, mourning, repentance, faith, an inward, universal, continued, and progressive change: direction, help, and succor, Rom. viii. 14, 26.—All our comfort and consolation, Rom. xv. 13.—Progressive and perfect sanctification, Tit. iii. 5; 2 Thess. ii. 13; 1 Pet. i. 2.—A knowledge of our title to, a preparation for, and an earnest of heaven.—For he "seals us to the day of redemption;" he marks us out for the Lord, stamps his image upon us, and preserves us to, and ensures to us, eternal and full redemption.—And yet men are wont to grieve this author of all good!

II. WHAT IS IMPLIED IN GRIEVING HIM, AND HOW THIS IS GENERALLY DONE.

Three expressions are used in scripture on this subject, which, though nearly related to each other, do not mean the same thing.—Doing "despite to the Spirit," Heb. x. 29; treating the Holy Spirit with contumely and affront: viz. blaspheming him, as by imputing the miracles wrought by his agency to the devil, calling his ordinary operations and grace a delusion of the devil, enthusiasm, &c.; persisting to sin wilfully in spite of all his remonstrances, Heb. x. 26.—"Quenching the Spirit." In allusion to fire, which is quenched or damped, by pouring water upon it, by heaping earth or ashes upon it, and whatever is not combustible; by withholding fuel from it, or by neglecting to stir it up. So may the Holy Spirit be quenched.—"Grieving the Spirit." By behaving unkindly towards him; as we grieve a friend, when he comes to warn us of danger, and urge us to flee to a place of safety, and we will not take warning and flee, Gen. xix. 12—14; when he comes to give us instruction and direction, and we refuse to receive it, as the Jews treated the prophets of old; to offer us help, and we reject the help offered, Matt. xxiii. 37; to invite us to partake of privileges and blessings, and we doat on trifling vanities, and disregard the invitation, John v. 40; Luke xiv. 16. To apply this. Our friend will be grieved and pained, not on his own account, but on ours; not merely or chiefly because we are enemies to him, but because we are enemies to ourselves; and the more he loves us, the more will he be grieved, and in the end will withdraw from us, and give us up.—

But to proceed to the persons by whom, and the manner wherein, that is generally done.—We observe, it is done by the impenitent, when called to repentance by the word; the Spirit accompanies the word, and they feel relentings, but relapse into their besetting sins, fly into company, or plunge into business:—when visited by affliction; the Spirit of God works with his providence, and they are humbled, and form resolutions; they recover, and forget them, and "their goodness is like the morning cloud." Isai. vii. 13, lxiii. 9, 10.—By the penitent, when invited to come to Christ and believe in him: the Spirit draws them by the word and the advice and exhortations of the saints, but, through indolence, they rest in outward reformation. or through unbelief sink into despondency, and "reject the counsel of

God against themselves ;” how slow are we to believe unless we see signs and wonders !—By believers. They have properly received the Spirit, and are sealed by him, as the text signifies ; but often grieve him, by yielding to unbelief, and slavish fears ; by pride and self-confidence, by the love of the world, by care and business, by evil tempers as discontentment or anger, by indulging in vain thoughts and trifling conversation, misemploying time and other talents, as health, and money, neglecting to do good, and so doing evil.—

III. THE SIN, FOLLY, AND MISERABLE CONSEQUENCES OF GRIEVING THE HOLY SPIRIT.

The sin of it.—It is an act of undutifulness and injustice. It may be compared with the sin of grieving a kind and faithful friend, a loving and tender father, an affectionate husband.—An act of ingratitude. The Spirit is the author of all spiritual and eternal blessings to us, as we have seen : he is God’s greatest and best gift, next to the gift of his Son. The gifts of God’s providence, the scriptures, and the means of grace, and even our redemption by Christ, are all lost upon us without the Spirit, who alone can enlighten, quicken, regenerate, direct, comfort, and seal us to the day of redemption. What is the greatness of the sin of grieving this author of all good to us ; the Spirit ; the Holy Spirit : the Holy Spirit of God !—

The folly of it.—It may be compared with the folly of grieving a friend, whose direction and help we continually want, a father, on whom we are dependant ; a husband, without whom we cannot live happy. If we grieve the Spirit, we grieve our only guide to heaven, forsaken of whom, we shall miss our way and never arrive there ;—the only physician of our fallen souls, by whom being given up, we shall remain sick for ever ; our only help against our enemies, being deserted of whom, we shall be overcome and destroyed ;—our only comforter in our troubles, without whom we shall certainly sink under them ;—the only one that can “ seal us to the day of redemption ;” and not being sealed, we shall want the knowledge of our title, and our chief qualification for heaven. Ezek. ix. 4.—

The miserable consequences of it.—So far as we grieve him, we remain ignorant, sinful, guilty, depraved, weak, and wretched.—Persisting to grieve him, we are doubly lost, as we should have been lost if the Spirit had not visited us at all ; we are in a superadded condemnation, because when “ light is come into the world, we loved darkness rather than light,” and rendered all God had done for our recovery vain : viz., the word of God, the means of grace, the death of Christ.—

INFER,

The great goodness of God, whose Spirit is grieved, because man will resolve to sin and perish !—The amazing perverseness of man, to whom it is as natural to grieve the Spirit as to breathe !—

Apply the whole to the impenitent, to mourners, to believers ; and exhort from motives of gratitude and self-interest.

THE CONSEQUENCES OF SIN.

Hos. viii. 7.—They have sown the wind, and they shall reap the whirlwind. (S. S.)

MISERY is attached to sin as its inevitable consequence—

This connection does not always appear to a superficial observer—

On the contrary transgression often seems productive of happiness—

And obedience, to be a source of much affliction and trouble—

But, whatever conclusions we may be led to draw from present appearances, we are sure that the wicked are not happy—

Nor have they any reasonable expectation of happiness in the eternal world—

The Israelites had forsaken the true God for idols—

And God warned them of the judgments which would ere long come upon them—

But the declaration in the text may be understood as a general position—

We shall take occasion from it to shew,

I. WHO MAY BE SAID TO SOW THE WIND.

To “sow the wind” is a proverbial expression for laboring in vain—

It is applied to idolaters, because the silver and gold lavished on idols was unprofitably spent—

And it may well be applied to all who seek happiness in a way of sin.

1. To sensualists.

They expect to find much comfort in the indulgence of their lusts—

Hence they yield themselves up to all the gratifications of sense—

But they find that such pursuits can afford them no real happiness—

While they forsake the fountain of living waters they hew out to themselves only broken cisterns that can hold no water—Jer. ii. 13.

Solomon, with the amplest means of enjoyment, confessed this—Eccl. ii.

1. 10, 11.

And we may address that appeal to all the votaries of pleasure—Rom. vi. 21.

2. To worldlings.

The lovers of this present world seem to follow something substantial—

They hope to obtain, not a momentary gratification, but solid and lasting benefits—

They promise to themselves the acquisition of ease, and affluence and respect—

But riches are justly, and on many accounts, termed “uncertain”—1 Tim. vi. 17.

No dependence can be placed on their continuance with us—Proverbs xxxiii. 5.

Our cares are also generally multiplied by means of them—

But if they were more conducive to happiness now, what shall they profit in the day of wrath?—Prov. xi. 4.

What advantage has he now, who once took such delight in his stores—Luke xii. 19.

Or he, who placed his happiness in sumptuous fare, and magnificent apparel?—Luke xvi. 19, 23, 24.

Surely all such persons will find ere long, that they “sowed the wind”—

3. To formalists.

The performance of religious duties seems more calculated to make us happy—

It is certain that no one can be happy who disregards them—

But a mere round of services can never satisfy the conscience—

‘The form of godliness without the power’ will avail little—

It will leave the soul in a poor, empty, destitute condition—

Some indeed delude themselves with an idea that it will secure the divine favor—

And, under that delusion, they may be filled with self-complacency—Luke xviii. 11, 12.

But if God send a ray of light into the mind, these comforts vanish—

A sight of sin will speedily dissipate these self-righteous hopes—Rom. vii. 9.

Nor will any thing satisfy an enlightened conscience but that which satisfies God—

There was but one remedy for the wounded Israelites in the wilderness—John iii. 14, 15.

Nor can a wounded spirit ever be healed but by a sight of Christ—

4. To false professors.

Many wish to be thought religious, when they are destitute of spiritual life—

They perhaps are zealous for the doctrines of the gospel, and for their own particular form of church government—

But they are not solicitous to live high to God in holy duties—

Nor do they manifest the efficacy of religion in their spirit and conduct—

Yet, because of their professing godliness, they think themselves possessed of it—

And busy up themselves with expectations of happiness in the world to come—

Alas! what disappointment will they one day experience!—Matt. xxv. 11, 22.

What will it avail them to “have had a name to live while they were really dead?”—

Or to have “cried, Lord, Lord, while they departed not from iniquity?”—

The pains they have taken to keep up a profession, will all be lost—

Nothing will remain to them but shame and confusion of face—

From the seed which they sow we may easily perceive,

II. WHAT THEY MAY EXPECT TO REAP.

“A whirlwind” is a figure used to represent extraordinary calamities—Job. i. 27.

And such is the harvest which they will reap in due season—

Their calamities will be,

1. Sudden.

The corn ripens gradually for the sickle, and its fate is foreseen—

But the destruction of the ungodly cometh suddenly and at an instant.

They indeed have many warnings from all which they see around them—

But they put the evil day far from them, and think it will never come—

2 Pet. iii. 4.

Thus it was with the whole world before the deluge—

Though Noah preached to them for many years, they would not regard him—

And were taken by surprise at last, as much as if no notice had been given them—Matt. xxiv. 38, 39.

Thus also it will be with all who reject the gospel salvation—

Solomon has expressly declared it in reference to those who sow discord—Prov. vi. 14.

And St. Paul has asserted it respecting all that live in a neglect of God. 1 Thess. v. 2, 3.

2. Irresistible.

Sinners of every description can withstand the word spoken by their fellow-creatures—Ezek. xx. 49.

But they will not be able to resist God when he shall call them into judgment—

Then, if the whole universe should enter into a confederacy to protect one sinner, they would fail in their attempt—Prov. xi. 21.

There is not any thing more irresistible to man, in some climates, than a whirlwind—

Yet far less power shall the ungodly have to avert the wrath of God—

They will be carried to destruction as the chaff before the wind—Ps. i. 4, 5.

And call in vain to the rocks to fall upon them, or the hills to cover them—Rev. vi. 15—17.

3. Tremendous.

Nothing can be conceived more dreadful than the desolation made by whirlwinds—

Yet this suggests a very inadequate idea of the ruin that will come on the ungodly—

The raining of fire and brimstone on Sodom and Gomorrah must have been exceeding terrible—

But even that was light, when compared with the vials of God's wrath which will be poured out upon the ungodly world—

Who can comprehend the full import of that threatening in the Psalms?—Ps. xi. 6.

Who can form a just idea of the judgment denounced by Isaiah—Isa. v. 24.

May we never experience such dreadful calamities!—

May we tremble at the apprehension of them, and seek shelter in Christ! —Isa. xxxii. 2.

INFER,

1. How earnest should we be in redeeming time.

The present hours are given us that we may sow for eternity—

Every action, word and thought is as seed that will spring up hereafter—

According to what we sow now, we shall reap at the last day—Gal. vi.

7, 8.

Every moment increases our "treasure of wrath," or our "weight" of glory"—

How should we be affected with this consideration!

Let us lay it to heart, and "walk not as fools, but as wise men"—Eph. v. 15, 16.

And let that just expostulation shame us to a sense of duty—Isa. lv. 2

2. How blessed are they who are living to God!

There is not a work which they perform for him that will not be rewarded—

God would esteem himself unjust if he made them no recompense—Heb. vi. 10.

However small and insignificant the service be, it shall not be forgotten—Matt. x. 42.

Some perhaps may complain, that they cannot do any thing for God

And. that they can only weep for their unprofitableness—

But the sighs and tears of the contrite are "precious seed"—

They will spring up to a glorious and abundant harvest—Ps. cxxxvi. 6.

Let the humble then go on "sowing in tears till they reap in joy"—

Let them persist in their labor, assured that it shall not be in vain—1 Cor. xv. 58.

THE END OF UNBELIEVERS.

1 Pet. iv. 17.—What shall the end be of them that obey not the gospel of God. (S. S.)

MANY are the troubles of the righteous: and though their afflictions are not always penal, yet they are for the most part to be considered as paternal chastisements, and as the judgments which God inflicts on his own household with a view to their advancement in faith and holiness—But though they are to be regarded in this favorable light by the sufferers themselves, they have a very awful aspect upon the world at large; for, as the Apostle intimates, if God's paternal chastisements be often so severe, what must his vindictive judgments be? If judgment first begin at the house of God, what must the end be of them that obey not the gospel of God?—To impress this solemn consideration upon our minds, we shall shew,

I. WHO THEY ARE THAT OBEY NOT THE GOSPEL.

To ascertain this, it will be proper to state briefly what the gospel requires.

The gospel supposes men to be in a state of guilt and misery, obnoxious to the wrath of God, and incapable of delivering themselves from it—It proposes to them a remedy of God's appointment: it sets forth Jesus as an all-sufficient Saviour; and declares that sinners of every description may be washed in his blood, and renewed by his Spirit—But, if we will not apply to him by faith, and thankfully accept his proffered benefits, it dooms us to destruction under the aggravated guilt of despising, and trampling under foot the Son of God—The commission which our Lord gave to his disciples, Mar. xvi. 15, 26, and the answer given by Paul to the awakened jailor, Acts xvi. 30, 31, abundantly confirm this view of the gospel, and shew that a cordial acceptance of Christ as our only Lord and Saviour is the sum and substance of a christian's duty—

According to this statement, very many will be found disobedient to the gospel.

1. They who neglect Christ altogether.

This is so obvious a truth that the mention of it seems needless and absurd: but experience proves that the most abandoned sinners, and most avowed infidels, are often insensible of the guilt which they contract—Be it known however, that their excuses or objections will avail them nothing in the day of judgment: their whole lives were one continued act of disobedience to the gospel; and they will most assuredly be numbered amongst the enemies of their incarnate God—Their rejection of him, whether in principle or practice, will be a decisive evidence of their guilt—

2. They who unite something else with him as a foundation for their hope.

The gospel requires us to renounce all dependence on our own works—However good our works be, they must never for one moment be considered

as justifying us before God, either in whole or in part—In Christ alone must be all our hope; and if we attempt to unite any thing of ours with his perfect righteousness, we shall not only not add to our security, but shall altogether invalidate all which Christ himself has done for us—St. Paul asserts this in the plainest terms, Gal. v. 2, 4; and from the fullest conviction of its truth desired to be found in Christ, clad with his righteousness and his only—Phil. iii. 9.

3. They who, while they profess to follow Christ, dishonor him by their conduct.

Many there are who with apparent zeal cry, Lord, Lord, who yet are far from doing the things which he commands—Many alas! “profess to know him, but in their works deny him:” they are observant of outward duties, but inattentive to their spirit and temper: instead of being meek and lowly, patient and forgiving, and solicitous only to honor God, they are proud and passionate, covetous and worldly, and studious rather to be thought christians than really to deserve the name—Let such know that they “amidst all their appearances of religion deceive themselves, and their religion is vain”—James i. 26. By neglecting to walk as Christ walked they disobey the gospel, as much as if they rejected him altogether—

To awaken such from their slumbers, we proceed to shew,

II. WHAT THEIR END SHALL BE.

The peculiar manner, in which the apostle speaks of their “end,” intimates that it will be dreadful,

1. Beyond expression.

In the text St. Peter infers from the trials, which God suffers to come upon believers *here*, the far greater miseries that shall be endured by unbelievers *hereafter*—But his very mode of suggesting this inference shews, that the two states could scarcely admit of any comparison: for what are any transient pains of body inflicted by the most ingenious cruelty of man, when compared with the eternal torments both of soul and body, which will be inflicted on the wicked by the hand of an incensed God?—St. Paul institutes a similar comparison, and, like St. Peter, leaves our imagination to supply what no language could possibly express—Heb. x. 29. There are indeed terms used in scripture to represent to us the misery of the damned—They are represented as “cast into a lake of fire and brimstone,” “where the worm of an accusing conscience dieth not, and the fire of God’s wrath is not quenched:” they “weep and wail and gnash their teeth;” and the “smoke of their torment ascendeth up for ever and ever:” But, awful as these expressions are, they convey no adequate idea of the misery sustained by those who have perished in unbelief: we must say of that, as St. Paul says of the things he heard and saw in the third heavens, that it is unutterable—2 Cor. xii. 4.

2. Beyond a doubt.

The apostle appeals to our own consciences for the truth of the inference which he suggests—He says, in effect, What must the state of unbelievers be? Can it be the same with that of obedient believers? Will God put no difference between those who serve him, and those who serve him not? Has not the scripture plainly declared the end of those who disobey the gospel? And are we not constrained to acknowledge the equity of that sentence, which the contemners of Christ are taught to expect?—Shall not an angel from heaven be accursed if he presume to preach any other gospel, Gal. i. 8, and can we hope to reject the gospel with impunity? Our wishes are doubtless in opposition to the declarations of God; but in our judgment

we must approve of them; and we shall surely be silent in the day, that they shall be enforced, even though we ourselves be the unhappy monuments of God's displeasure—

We may *learn* from hence,

1. How to improve the dispensations of God's providence.

In God's providential dealings the most eminent christians are often involved in public calamities, or bowed down under a load of personal afflictions—On the other hand the enemies of God often triumph, and revel in a fullness of all earthly enjoyments—But the intelligent christian will see in these dispensations the certainty of a future day of retribution, when the wicked shall receive the just reward of their wickedness, and he himself be exalted to an inconceivable state of bliss—He will argue thus: If God so afflict his children in the day of his mercy, how will he punish his enemies in the day of his wrath? And if he so prosper his enemies and load them with benefits in this vale of tears, what prosperity and happiness must he have reserved for his friends in the regions of glory? If crowns and kingdoms be the portion of many who disregard and despise him, what shall be the inheritance of those who honor and obey him?—Such are the reflections suggested in the text; and such are the considerations which every dispensation, whether joyous or grievous, should excite in our minds.

2. How to judge of our state before God.

Mere morality is by no means a sufficient criterion whereby to judge of our state: we may be free from gross violations of God's law, and yet be far from yielding obedience to the gospel—Let us then enquire whether we be obeying the gospel by a simple dependence upon Christ, and by a spirit and temper suited to our profession? This is the test to which we must bring ourselves, since we shall be tried by it at the last day—In vain will be our morality, if Christ be not our only foundation; and in vain will be our professed adherence to Christ, if we do not adorn the gospel by an holy conversation—Let us then examine ourselves, that we may know beforehand what our end shall be—And let all earthly comforts or troubles be improved as means of exciting us to flee from the wrath to come, and to lay hold on eternal life.

THE CHARACTER AND END OF A SENSUALIST

Luke xii. 20, 21.—But God said unto him, thou fool! this night thy soul shall be required of thee: then whose shall those things be which thou hast provided? so is he that layeth up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God. (Sk.)

How must these words have struck the ears, and have sunk into the soul of the person to whom they were addressed! Fancy to yourselves a man wholly engaged by the affairs of this life;—quite unconcerned about his situation as a dying mortal; and as a creature accountable to God;—his salvation—his immortal concerns—entirely neglected;—at night, and alone, ruminating and contriving thus,—“what shall I do,” &c., ver. 17—19, when—sudden and unexpected—he hears that voice, from whose sentence there is no appeal, saying, “fool! this night thy soul shall be required of thee,” &c. But why did I say, *fancy* all this? When all that was worldly and thoughtless in this man, it probably realized in the disposition and conduct of many present, who differ from him, not in character, but in situation.

against him the sentence of death had just been pronounced; against you it is not yet uttered. Thanks be to God that it is not! You are still in a land of hope. Oh! suffer me to expose the impropriety and danger of your conduct, by describing—*the folly of this person; and the manner in which God treated him.*

I. THE FOLLY OF THE PERSON MENTIONED IN THE TEXT: The meaning of the word “fool,” as it is here applied, may be discovered by consulting the following passages; Deut. xxxii. 6; Psal. xciv. 8; Prov. xiv. 9; Rom. i. 21—25; Tit. iii. 3; Jer. xvii. 11. Thus understood, *folly* is wickedness; and the folly of this man consisted in,

1. *His making the things of this life his chief good.* That he did this, is manifest, from the whole of what is said respecting him.—The world was his god:—it had his heart;—all his wishes centred in it;—his thoughts were absorbed by its concerns;—he appears to have known no higher gratification than that which arose from eating, drinking, and making merry. How wicked was all this! It implies a total want of regard for God, Psal. lii. 7. If he were not a covetous man—one who is never satisfied—he was evidently a sensualist, who lived only for himself: see Rom. viii. 6, 13, and xiii. 14; Gal. vi. 7, 8. Besides, how foolish to depend on uncertain riches! Prov. xxiii. 5, and xi. 28; Jer. ix. 23. Can any measure of them keep off sickness, infirmities, or the ‘thousand other ills that flesh is heir to?’ Can they prolong life, or set death at defiance? Job xxxvi. 18, 19. Such conduct tends to sensualize the very spirit. Hence, another proof of this man’s folly, is manifest in,

2. *His supposing that worldly goods would satisfy his soul.* Though he appears to have believed that he had a soul, his ideas of its nature must have been very gross; or could he have said “*soul*, thou hast much goods; eat, drink, be merry?” The folly of such conduct will appear, if we consider—the *nature of the soul*. It is a spiritual, and a rational principle, Gen. i. 27, and ii. 7; Job xxxii. 8. Can the gross materials that feed the body satisfy the soul?—*The capacities of the soul*. They, on account of its very nature, are so vast, that no measure of created good can possibly satisfy them.—*The duration of the soul*. It is immortal, everlasting, Eccl. xii. 7; Matt. x. 28. Can perishable things—such as earth affords—earth that will itself be destroyed, satisfy the immortal soul of man? Such foolish conduct, as that already described, naturally leads to another species of folly, that of,

3. *Presuming on continued, on long life.* He said, “*soul*, thou hast much goods laid up *for many years*.” How infatuated must that man have been, who could thus calculate! see Psal. xlix. 11—13. Do we not see mortals arrested, and borne to their graves, at every stage of life! How frequently do we hear the sighs and groans of the dying:—we feel pains, infirmities, and decays of nature, which are sure harbingers of death;—and in the death of relatives and friends, we almost taste the deadly draught; and yet men will, with confidence, calculate on long life!

4. *Thus one species of folly or of wickedness leads to another.* Men make created things their chief good; then persuade themselves that such things will satisfy even their souls: this is naturally followed by a wish to enjoy them for many years; and then they persuade themselves, that for many years they shall enjoy them. Persons of the above description do not always pass for wicked men, Psal. xlix. 18, but in the sight of God, their conduct is highly offensive, Jer. xvii. 5, as will appear from,

II. THE MANNER IN WHICH GOD TREATED THE SUBJECT OF THIS FOLLY. We have in the Bible such numerous intimations of the goodness, the mercy,

and the longsuffering of God, as should correct the ideas of those, who, being penitent, would despair of his mercy; and of those whose severe dispositions would lead them to describe the blessed God only as a terrible sovereign. But we have, on the other hand, such intimations of God's justice, and of the exercise of the divine displeasure towards the impenitent, as should alarm the boldest offender; and correct the errors of those, who, by a species of humanity, would question the divine prerogative to punish, let the guilty escape, and even annihilate hell itself. The circumstance under consideration speaks awful things.

1. *This man was called away* SUDDENLY. "God said unto him, *this night* thy soul shall be required of thee." Sudden death had been considered an evil; hence that petition in the liturgy, "from sudden death, good Lord, deliver us." In whatever light it may be viewed, as it respects the righteous, to the wicked it must be terrible. It finds them unprepared; it snatches them from all they love; it hurries them, in their sins, before the bar of God. See Prov. xiv. 32.

2. *He was called away* UNEXPECTEDLY. He had been calculating only on life and worldly enjoyments; on living long and enjoying much. What a terrible, and unexpected arrest! Even a good man cannot fail to be seriously affected by such a circumstance. See 2 Kings xx. 1—8; Isa xxxviii. 9.

3. *He was called away* AMIDST A PROFUSION OF WORLDLY GOODS. "Much goods laid up," was his language. Some in a state of wretchedness, misery, and want, without calculating on future consequences, have sought and have welcomed death, as a kind of deliverer from present wo. However dreadfully mistaken, such, though unprepared, have left the world without regret. But this man loved life: he had, to use a common phrase, "made his fortune," and was going to enjoy life. Ah! in what period, and in what circumstance could death be more unwelcome? See Job xx. 22, 23; Eccles. vi. 1, 2.

4. *He was called away* BY LANGUAGE THAT STRONGLY EXPRESSED THE DIVINE DISPLEASURE. The language is truly *cutting*. He had said, "*soul* thou hast," &c.; God said, "*thy soul* is required." He had calculated on "*many years*;" God said, "*this night* thy soul shall be required." He had said, "*soul, thou hast much goods*;" God said, "*whose* shall these things be?" He had acted *a part the most foolish*; and God addressed him by the cutting appellation, "*fool*." He had passed through his day of grace, *totally neglecting salvation*; and God summoned him away, *unrenewed and unforgiven*. What a dreadful circumstance! and yet from the remainder of our text, we are led to fear that circumstances of this kind are not uncommon; for "*so is he that layeth up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God*."

The following reflections urge themselves on our attention:

1. Worldly prosperity is so far from being a proof of personal goodness, or of the divine favor, that the subjects of it may be so wicked as to incur sudden and severe destruction. See Ps. lxxiii. 2—12, 18, 19.

2. The proper enjoyment of life does not depend on large possessions, verse 15.

3. Rich men are, on account of their riches, in peculiar danger—of living without God—of indulging in sensual gratifications—of presuming on long life—and of neglecting their souls.

4. Life is uncertain.—It is therefore our highest wisdom to be living for eternity. Oh that men, instead of inquiring, as they too often do, in the

language of worldly concern, and of worldly anxiety, "what shall we do?" would thus inquire after salvation. Then would we gladly point them to Jesus the mighty Saviour, to religion the true riches, and to heaven the only sure depository, for what is truly valuable in time or in eternity.



A DESCRIPTION OF THE WICKED, AND THE HELL INTO WHICH THEY SHALL BE TURNED.

Psa. ix. 17.—The wicked shall be turned into hell, and all the nations that forget God. (Sk.)

THE authorized topics afforded to God's ministers, for instruction and reproof, are various and dissimilar. Revelation presents innumerable subjects to our view; all of which, though not of equal importance, are worthy of the deepest attention and the most implicit confidence; some of these are the themes of every gospel minister, and the delight of every christian congregation—the love of God to the world—the atonement of Christ for sinners—the invitations of the gospel to the most unworthy—and the heaven prepared for the saints, are truths of the most pleasing aspect, and the most encouraging character. Happy should we be in beholding all who sit under our ministry, charmed, converted, and drawn to God by the publication of these truths; but, alas! many are yet hardened through the deceitfulness of sin. These we must persuade by the terrors of the Lord, or "save with fear, pulling them out of the fire." Many are yet wicked; these must be told of the punishment which they are preparing for themselves—this is their "portion of meat" which must be administered "in due season,"—and this is the only apology we make for laying before you the awful affirmation chosen for the text; "The wicked shall be turned into hell," &c. Here observe,

I. THE CHARACTERS SPECIFIED;—"The wicked, and all the nations that forget God." Scripture is its own interpreter; and in describing the characters spoken of in the text, we will be guided by this rule, and compare spiritual things with spiritual. By the wicked, then, we understand,

1. *All those who willfully violate the plain and positive precepts of God.* Such as intemperate persons, who eat or drink to excess, Nah. i. 10; Joel i. 5; Luke xii. 34; Rom. xiii. 13; Eph. v. 18. Profane persons, whose mouths are full of cursing and bitterness, Exod. xx. 7; Matt. v. 34; James v. 12. Liars, Zech. viii. 16; Colos. iii. 9; Rev. xxii. 15. Profaners of the Sabbath, who prostitute that holy day in purposes of pleasure or business, Exod. xx. 8; Isaiah lvi. 2, and lviii. 13. Dishonest persons, who deprive their neighbors of their property, by acts of theft or extortion; taking advantage of their ignorance or necessity, to enhance the price of their goods, Exod. xx. 17; Matt. x. 19; 1 Thess. iv. 6.

2. *Among the wicked we must include all the persecutors of the people of God.* Such was Pharaoh, who said, "The Lord is righteous, and I and my people are wicked;"—such was Manasseh, who shed innocent blood very much, and "who wrought much wickedness," 2 Kings xxi. 6;—such was Haman, who meditated a plan for the destruction of all the Jews from India even unto Ethiopia, and who is designated as "this wicked Haman;"—and such were the Jews in the days of our Saviour, whom he denominated a "wicked generation," and concerning whom Peter said, "Ye have taken, and by wicked hands" &c., Acts ii. 23.

3. *In the list of wicked persons we also rank all hypocrites, and impostors in religion*; who profess to know God, but by works deny him. Such were the Pharisees, who came to our Lord, Matt. xxii. 15; but Jesus "perceived their wickedness," &c.; for though they made clean "the outside of the cup and platter, their inward part was full of ravening and wickedness," Luke xi. 39.

4. *All must be denominated wicked who are unregenerate.* Wickedness is not a superficial defect, but a profound radical principle, deeply rooted in the heart of man, which is said to be "desperately wicked:"—the crimes we have enumerated are a few only, of the fatal fruits produced by this root of bitterness. Man, considered as a fallen creature, is not merely inclined to wickedness, but his inward part is very wickedness: and this applies not only to a few individuals, but to all; for "the world lieth in wickedness:" and unless your hearts have been washed from wickedness, in the fountain opened for sin and uncleanness, you must be included in the characters specified in the text. But, in addition to the wicked, we have "all nations that forget God."—Perhaps this expression refers to heathen nations, whose gods were idols, Psa. xvi. 5; but how far the whole inhabitants of any nation forget God we cannot determine. Nations are composed of individuals, and every man who forgets God (whatever be his country, clime, or language) must be included here. The latter part of the text may be considered as explanatory of the former—the wicked are they who forget God. David's description of a wicked man is, "God is not in all his thoughts," Psa. x. 4;—he forgets God in the character of a *Sovereign*, and refuses to walk in his law, Psa. xii. 4;—as a *Benefactor*, he renders not again according to the benefit done unto him, 2 Chron. xxxii. 25;—he forgets *the all-prevailing presence of God*, so as to have no consciousness that God seeth;—he forgets *the word of God*—to its precepts he never conforms—with its invitations he never complies—its promises he never embraces—and its threatenings he never fears. Having described the characters specified in the text, let us consider,

II. THE AFFIRMATION MADE CONCERNING THEM;—"They shall be turned into hell." Here we may remark three things—the *place* into which they shall be turned—the *manner* how it will be done—and the *certainty* of the affirmation. The place is *hell*, *העל* a word used sometimes to describe the grave, or a separate state of departed spirits, Gen. xxxvii. 35; Psa. xvi. 10; but more commonly descriptive of that place of punishment into which the souls of the wicked shall be thrust, when discharged from the body, Luke xvi. 23. The holy scripture, which must be our sole guide in all things that relate to the eternal world, gives us various ideas concerning this awful state of being.

1. *It describes the place of punishment.* It is called "outer darkness," Matt. viii. 12;—a lake of fire, burning with brimstone, Rev. xix. 20, xx. 10;—a bottomless pit, Rev. ix. 1, 2, xx. 1, 2;—blackness, Jude 13;—the mist of darkness, 2 Pet. ii. 17, xx. 1, 2;—a furnace of fire, Matt. xiii. 42.

2. *The nature of the punishment.* It will be inflicted by fire—fire unquenchable, Matt. iii. 12; Luke iii. 17. The pain produced by fire, is the most intolerable that the body can sustain; even when it only touches a part of our flesh, how exquisite is the torment we feel; what then must the punishment of the damned be, who will be cast into a lake of fire? But there will be in hell, deep mental anguish; "there the worm dieth not," Mark ix. 43. This metaphor is used to describe the inward agonies, which the soul must sustain from the stings of conscience. Something of this kind is

intimated by Homer, who, in describing the sufferings of Tityus in hell, says,

“Two ravenous vultures, furious for their food
Scream o’er the fiend, and riot in his blood,
Incessant gore the liver in his breast,
Th’ immortal liver grows, and gives the immortal feast.”

Odys. b. xi. 709.

The Roman poets, like the Grecian, describe furies as avengers of wickedness in hell. They represent these furies, as old, squalid, meagre, and pale; they clothe their bodies with black garments; affix to their heads vipers instead of hair, and arm their hands with scorpions, whips, and torches, &c. In hell, the wicked will also be punished by the just judgment of God. Who can read such texts as the following, without being struck with horror at the view of their punishment? Deut. xxxii. 23—41; Psa. xi. 6; Jer. xxiii. 19; 2 Thess. i. 7—9; Rev. xiv. 9—11.

3. *The exquisite sense of punishment which the wicked will feel.*—“There shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth, when ye shall see Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, and all the prophets in the kingdom of God; and you yourselves thrust out,” Luke xiii. 28; Matt. xiii. 42, xxii. 13, and xxiv. 51. Weeping and wailing, in the view of that eternal loss which they had sustained, for they shall see Abraham, &c., in the kingdom of God;—and from a consciousness that they might have shared in the same blessedness;—and “gnashing of teeth,” with undescribed agony, and inward vexation, for having plunged themselves into that place of torment; with envy at the saints, and every expression of rage and malice against God and goodness.

4. *The companions of their punishment.* Besides the fearful and unbelieving, the abominable, murderers, whoremongers, sorcerers, idolaters, liars, thieves, drunkards, and revilers, 1 Cor. vi. 10; Rev. xxi. 8, of which the wicked will be composed; they will be associated with “the devil and his angels,” Matt. xxv. 41. The devil, who is described as an old serpent—an adversary—a dragon—and a roaring lion;—“his angels,” his messengers;—these will be the tormentors of the wicked, Matt. xviii. 34. Their tempters here, will be their tormentors in hell; they will probably remind them of their folly—of their crimes—and of the heaven they have lost, and “toss their infamy from tongue to tongue.”

5. *The perpetuity of their punishment.* The fire of hell is unquenchable, and the worm is deathless. The punishment is everlasting; the great gulf that intervenes between paradise and perdition, is impassable; and the crimes of the wicked, after death are unpardonable, Matt. xii. 32, xxv. 42, 2 Thess. i. 9; Rev. xiv. 11.

“The wicked shall be turned into hell;”—this shall be done,

1. *Unexpectedly.* A few indeed have presentiments of their approaching punishment, and forebodings of their impending doom; but the great mass of the wicked are lulled to sleep by the fascinating charms of sin, and the dreadful delusions of the devil;—are led on blindly towards destruction; and, contrary to all their expectations, are turned into hell.

2. *Suddenly.* How many are cut off in a moment! Death suddenly seizes upon them, and they go down *quick* into hell, Psa. lv. 23. And though many of the wicked may linger on to old age, yet the stroke of death is sudden, Psa. lxxiii. 19; Prov. xxix. 1; 1 Thess. v. 3.

3. *Irresistibly.* The expression in the text conveys an idea of violence and impetuosity; *turned*, or hurried headlong into hell; driven by death into

the territories of perdition. The destruction of the wicked will come upon them as a whirlwind, Prov. i. 27. They will be bound hand and foot, and taken away and cast into outer darkness, Matt. xxii. 13.

The certainty of the affirmation in the text, may be inferred,

1. *From the general consent of mankind.* The idea of future punishment has been almost universal, from the remotest periods of antiquity; and it cannot be supposed that men of different ages, and distant countries, would agree on this point, if the idea had not rested on grounds of wide extent, discernible to the understandings of men in general.

2. *From the justice of the moral Governor of the universe.* In the present state of things, evil goes unpunished in a thousand instances, either by human or divine justice; but the Judge of all the earth will do right, and will not suffer the eternal laws of right and wrong to be violated with impunity; and as the wicked are not punished here, the righteousness of God will induce him to turn them into hell.

3. *From the moral unfitness of the wicked for any other situation.* They must die, and heaven or hell must receive them; but they are totally unfit for the former, and completely prepared for the latter. Heaven is the region of holiness, and the habitation of the great King; but into his presence they cannot come, for evil shall not dwell with him; they cannot even see God; to hell they *must* go, this is the reward of their hands, the meed of their toil, and the wages of their iniquity.

4. *The certainty of the affirmation is incontestibly proved from the Bible.* Psal. lxxv. 8; Matt. xxv. 41. We conclude by observing—How awful is the state of the wicked! Language fails to describe the horror and punishment that await them; and what is most to be deplored, they have no knowledge of their danger. Oh how amazing is the infatuation that has seized them!—But what deep commiseration should christians feel in contemplating the circumstances of their wicked neighbors, and especially the awful state of heathen nations! Oh what efforts should they make to save souls from death!—and what praise should they offer to God, who has plucked them as brands from the burning, and saved them from those things of which they are now ashamed.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE BLESSEDNESS OF RELIGION.

THE CITY OF GOD

Psalm lxxxvii. 3.—Glorious things are spoken of thee, O city of God. (Sk.)

ALTHOUGH the whole of this Psalm literally refers to the ancient city of David, it is undoubtedly an encomium on the glory and privileges of the gospel church, of which Jerusalem was a type. Jerusalem was exalted and fortified by its situation, but much more so by the favor and protection of Jehovah, ver. 1, 2. "He loved the gates of Zion more than all the dwellings of Jacob." What Jerusalem *was*, that the christian church *now is*—Built by God "upon the foundation," &c., Eph. ii. 20. He loves her

beyond the kingdoms and empires of the earth, which rise and fall only to subserve his purposes concerning her. But although Jerusalem was eminently typical of the church on earth, it was no less so of the triumphant church above.—We shall therefore contemplate the words of our text,

I. IN THEIR LITERAL REFERENCE TO THE JEWISH METROPOLIS. Jerusalem was truly the “city of God;”—the city which he particularly chose—to which he paid especial regard. Hence “glorious things” were spoken of her. She was beautiful for situation, magnificent in her buildings, the delight of the nations, and the joy of the whole earth. She was the emporium of Jewish commerce, and the seat of oriental learning. Above all others, the following glorious things were spoken of this city :

1. *There was the seat of the civil government.* There were the splendid courts of the kings of Judah. “There,” says the Psalmist, “are set the thrones of judgment,” &c.—There the princes and nobles resided—thence issued the mandates by which the people were governed, &c.

2. *There the divine ordinances were celebrated.* There was the ark, the altar, the sacrifices, the stupendous temple of Solomon, and the testimony of Jehovah—There were the singers, the musicians, and the priests—Yea, there were the visible symbols of the divine glory, and the king of heaven dwelling in the midst of his people, 2 Chron. vii. 16; Ps. xlviii.

3. *There was the general rendezvous of all the Israelitish tribes.* Three times a year all the males came up to worship at Jerusalem. How interesting to see such multitudes all assembled to praise the Lord in the beauty of holiness, playing on sacred instruments, singing, making solemn processions, &c.

4. This city received a *glorious name*, “vision of peace;” and was at length honored with the *presence of our Lord*, “the Prince of Peace.”

II. IN THEIR SPIRITUAL APPLICATION TO THE CHURCH OF CHRIST. St. Paul styles this, “Jerusalem which is from above, which is the mother of us all”—of all believers, Gal. iv. 26. Hence Christians are represented as “fellow citizens,” Eph. ii. 19. Now of this spiritual city, the antetype of Zion, glorious things are spoken :—

1. *That she is gloriously founded by the living God.* The church exists by his good pleasure and purpose. The plan was formed in the divine counsels, and fulfilled by the divine hand. 1. She is built upon Jesus the sure foundation and precious corner stone. 2. He purchased the church with his own blood. 3. Instituted all her ordinances. 4. Quickens every member by his own spirit. 5. Protects and supports her by his power, and, 6. Designs by all the wonders of his providence and grace to establish her for ever.

2. *That she possesses glorious privileges.* All ancient enfranchised cities had various immunities and privileges—but none ever had such as are enjoyed in the church. Some of these are, 1. Spiritual illumination. The church is to the world as *Goshen to Egypt*. 2. Justification by faith. 3. The peace of God. 4. Divine love. 5. Joy in the Holy Ghost. 6. Protection from danger. 7. Triumph over enemies. 8. Inestimable riches, and glorious dignities. 9. The constant presence and favor of Christ.

3. *That she contains glorious inhabitants.* Suitable to the dignity of the founder, and the value of the privileges, is the character of the denizens. 1. They are all *free*, Gal. iv. 31. 2. They are a *heavenly race*, born of God, 1 John iii. 1. 3. *A holy people*. 4. *Priests and kings*, 1 Peter ii. 9; Rev. i. 6. 5. *Heirs of God, and joint heirs with Christ*, Rom. viii. 17; Ps. xv.

4. *That glorious promises shall be accomplished in her.* See a summary of these, in that magnificent prophecy, Isa. lx.

III. IN THEIR GRANDEST TYPICAL REFERENCE TO HEAVEN ITSELF. Heaven is emphatically “the city of the Great King”—the “city which hath foundations”—“which is to come.”—The city which the ancient patriarchs sought, and which St. John saw in vision, and afterwards described.

The future state of the saints is represented by various figures, calculated to convey the sublimest ideas of its perfection—a mansion—inheritance—crown, throne, &c.—But it is a *place* as well as a *state*. Though the essence of Deity pervades immensity, yet every other nature being finite, it is necessary there should be a *local* display of his glory, in some central point, where all the happy intelligences of the universe may be collected. That place is heaven; and glorious things are spoken thereof in the oracles of God. It is,

1. *Surpassingly grand in magnificence.* There the throne of the Supreme Glory is erected—and there the manifestations of Deity are witnessed—The sun is a splendid object here—the radiance of the stars, and the beauty of the firmament, impress our senses strongly—but these, and all other resplendent objects which glitter in mortal eyes, have no glory by reason of that which excelleth. See Rev. iv. and xxi. 9, to xxii. 5, where this glory is minutely described.

2. *Absolutely complete in its enjoyments.* This will clearly appear when we consider that it comprises,

1. The perfect exclusion of all evil—
2. The utmost perfection of body and soul—
3. The visions and fruition of God and Christ—
4. The most glorious and amicable society—
5. The most pleasing engagements.—

3. *Eternal in its duration.* Being built by Jehovah, it rests upon his own goodness, power, and truth—an immovable basis. “The saints shall reign for ever and ever.”—Believers “shall not perish, but have everlasting life;” God “who had given us the hope of eternal life by Christ Jesus before the world began,” cannot lie, or deny himself, Titus i. 2, 3.—This is the brightest gem in the crown of righteousness—the most radiant star in the constellation of future glory.

IMPROVEMENT. How important to be citizens of the spiritual Jerusalem, the gospel church! It was an honor and a privilege to be a denizen of ancient Jerusalem—how much greater to belong to this holy community; especially as this also qualifies us for the Jerusalem above.—

2. How cheerfully should christians welcome death! It will release them from earth and send them home to their Father’s house! Purified by the blood of Jesus, they should hail the day of dissolution.

“O happy day—that breaks our iron chain!
That manumits,—that calls from exile home!
That leads to nature’s great metropolis,
And re-admits us, through the guardian hand
Of elder brother, to our Father’s throne!
Who hears our advocate, and through his wounds
Beholding man, allows that tender name.”—“’Tis this,” &c.

3. How foolish those who remain strangers to, and foreigners from the church, and thereby exclude themselves from heaven.

THE CHRISTIAN CONDUCTED TO GLORY

Psalm lxxiii. 24.—Thou shalt guide me with thy counsel, and afterward receive me to glory. (Sk.)

WHEN at the Divine command the Israelitish host forsook the land of Egypt, and entered upon the wilderness of the Red Sea, Jehovah was pleased to guide them as a flock by the hands of Moses and Aaron, but more especially by the mysterious pillar, which was as a cloud by day, and as a fire by night. By this instrument he safely led them through the sea—through the difficulties and perils of the wilderness—and conducted them to the frontiers of Canaan; then dividing Jordan before them, he received them into the land of rest, “the land flowing with milk and honey, which is the glory of all lands.” These circumstances afford our text a striking illustration, as they form a beautiful emblem of the christian’s journey through life, under the guiding and protecting hand of Jehovah, who at length divides the stream of death for his ransomed to pass over, and receives him into the Canaan of everlasting repose. The Psalmist had been tempted to envy the wicked, ver. 2, 15; but having vanquished the temptation, he labored to turn it to an advantage by increasing in humility, in love to God, and confidence in his care. In the text he beautifully opposes his own character and end to that of the wicked. “Instead of following the devices of my own heart like the wicked, “thou shalt guide me with thy *counsel*.” Instead of being like them cast down into destruction when life is ended, “thou shalt receive me to *glory*.”” The text therefore expresses,

I. A GOOD MAN’S CONFIDENCE FOR THIS LIFE. “Thou shalt guide me with thy counsel.” Counsel frequently means advice or instruction, frequently design or purpose. Either of these would apply here; but there is another signification, which embraces both the former, and extends much farther. Counsel is properly that which adapts means to the end. When we have an important design to accomplish, we have recourse to counsel, which provides suitable means to secure our object. Now the great end which God proposes concerning us is our salvation. To accomplish this, his counsel has provided means, viz. his providence, word, and Spirit. Hence, to be guided by his counsel, is to follow,

1. *The leadings of his providence.* God holds the reins of government in his own hands, and regulates human affairs. His various dispensations plainly mark out to attentive minds the path in which they should walk as to their earthly concerns, viz., their *employments, situations, and objects of pursuit*. No man can be guided by the Divine counsel who does not move in this providential road. When we get out of the way of God’s appointment, we resemble a dislocated limb, for every motion gives us pain, Prov. iv. 26.

2. *The directions of his word.* The Bible explicitly reveals “the whole counsel of God.” It affords ample information on every point relative to our duty, or interest; our present, or future felicity. It exhibits the way of life so luminously, that “the wayfaring man, though a fool, need not err therein.” “Thy word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path.” It is our only rule of faith, and of practice. It points *guilty* man to the atoning blood for *pardon*. It directs *polluted* man to seek the regenerating, purifying influences of the *Holy Spirit*. It opens to *miserable* man the richest source of *consolation*; and unfolds to *mortal* man an interminable prospect of “glory, honor, and immortality.”

3. *The teaching of his Spirit*, John xvi. 13. This is always in perfect conformity with the written word, nor can it possibly be contradictory thereto. But the Spirit is sent to open our understandings, that we may comprehend the scriptures; to apply their doctrines and general rules to particular characters and cases; and to render the truth vital, penetrating, and efficacious. He emphatically speaks to the heart through the dispensations of providence, and the ministry of man, as well as by secret illuminations, impressions, and attractions. "Thou shalt guide me with thy counsel." The Psalmist's language pleasingly marks,

1. *His humility*. "'Thou shalt guide me," for I cannot guide myself.' See his humiliating confession, ver. 22. Equally convinced is the christian now, "that it is not in man who walketh to direct his steps;" he dares not trust his own understanding or heart; 'Whither,' he exclaims, 'my erring judgment, and my impetuous passions, whither, would you conduct me, if I were left to your guidance? Alas! experience returns a melancholy answer to this question. Oh my God! *thou*, thou only shalt guide me with thy counsel. I will trust in thee with all my heart, and not lean unto my own understanding. I will acknowledge thee in all my ways, that thou mayest direct my paths.'

2. *His submission and acquiescence*. 'However displeasing to flesh and blood, I cheerfully follow thy guidance.' When a man is led or guided, he is not driven, dragged, or constrained; he voluntarily follows his conductor. The christian is not compelled to follow the divine counsel; he willingly consents and submits to it. This is a disposition essentially necessary, for God often conducts us through paths which cause every natural feeling to recoil.

3. *His strong assurance*. "'Thou shalt guide me," &c. He had no doubt of being safely conducted, notwithstanding all his ignorance and weakness. Thus the christian, distrusting himself, is nevertheless fully assured that God will guide him securely through all vicissitudes of time, Isa. lxiii. 9; Deut. xxxii. 10, 11, 12.

II. A GOOD MAN'S CONFIDENCE FOR ETERNITY. Thou shalt "afterward receive me to glory." All the vast machinery of providence, and the still more wonderful economy of grace, tend to this grand purpose, to prepare the soul for glory. This is God's ultimate end in all. And when the christian arrives at the brink of that dark flood, which all must pass; his God is there, to bring him in safety through, and to receive him on the shore of everlasting deliverance, where he is crowned with unwithering honours, and filled with ineffable delight. He is received,

1. *To a glory of condition*. Contrast the meanness of his condition on earth, with the unsearchable riches, the immortal beauty, and the radiant majesty, to which he is the legitimate heir in the eternal state. Contrast also the imperfection of his intellectual powers, and the scantiness of his knowledge here, with the vigor of the former, and the immensity of the latter, in glory.

2. *To a glory of charity*. While here, the christian was regarded as base and mean. He was degraded, vilified, and slandered. Reproach and ignominy marked his career. But God renders his character glorious. In heaven all acknowledge him as a saint—a son of God—an heir of God—a priest—a king of glory.

3. *To a solid, substantial glory*. Earthly glory is an empty bubble, calculated only to glitter and deceive. But this is "a *weight* of glory," a

satisfying reality; the honor which comes from God, and which is suited to the dignity of man.

4. *To a permanent, unfading glory.* "An eternal weight of glory." When the sun shall lose his radiance, when the stars shall be extinguished, and all nature dissolved, then shall the christian shine with undecaying lustre, and be adorned with immortal splendors. His life and happiness, and glory, shall last forever, Matt. xiii. 43: Rom. ii. 7—10.

Such is the design of God. A design directly opposite to that of satan, who wishes to guide men by the counsels of the ungodly, the corruptions of their hearts, and his own suggestions, to everlasting perdition. Into which of these designs have we entered? Our tempers, conversation, and life, have already decided this question. Whose counsel shall guide us for the future? May we all reply,—we will follow the counsel of the Lord! Amen.

THE CHRISTIAN'S HAPPINESS.

1 Peter i. 8, 9.—Whom having not seen, ye love; in whom, though now ye see him not, yet believing, ye rejoice with joy unspeakable, and full of glory; receiving the end of your faith, even the salvation of your souls. (H. H.)

THE world often wonder that christians do not conform to the vices of the age—1 Pet. iv. 4.

And are yet more surprised that any should be willing to suffer for the sake of their religion—

But every christian is actuated by a principle of love to Christ—

This principle even gathers strength from the opposition it meets with—

The apostle is writing to those who were in heaviness through manifold temptations—

He declares, however, that their trials were promoting their eternal good—

He then shews that they were supported under them by their attachment to Christ—

In his words we may see,

I. THE STATE OF TRUE CHRISTIANS—

Christians cannot be distinguished better by any thing, than by their regard to their divine Master:

1. They love Christ—

Once, like the ungodly around them, they were enemies to Christ and his cross—Phil. iii. 19.

They "saw no beauty in him, for which he is to be desired"—Isa. liii. 2.

But now he is truly precious to their souls—1 Pet. ii. 7.

They claim him as their best friend and portion—Cant. v. 10.

This is the character of every true christian—Eph. vi. 24.

If any answer not to this character, they are, and must be, accursed—1 Cor. xvi. 22.

2. They rejoice in Christ—

They have a good hope, if not a full assurance, of an interest in him—

They have access to him in their secret duties—

They receive strengthening and refreshing communications from him—

They rejoice in him, as their faithful and almighty Friend—Phil. iv. 4.

Their joy in him is "incapable of being fully declared"—

It is a "glorified" joy, such as the saints in heaven possess†—

Every christian indeed does not experience the same measure of joy; nor is any one at all times alike joyful—

But no one is a christian, who does not esteem the light of the Redeemer's countenance above every other good—Ps. iv. 6, and lxxiii. 25.

That their felicity may be more generally experienced, we proceed to state,

II. THE MEANS BY WHICH THEY ATTAIN IT.

Paul was favored with a sight of Christ at the time of his conversion—

But this is not the way in which the christian's state is attained—

Many suppose, that if they could have a personal interview with Christ, they should love him, and rejoice in him—

But a sight of him with the bodily eyes only never produced this effect—

Many who even heard his discourses, and beheld his miracles, were amongst his bitterest enemies—

The christians to whom St. Peter wrote had never seen Christ—

His apostle *twice* mentions this circumstance, to shew that their regard for him did not arise from any personal acquaintance with him—

Faith is the only mean whereby we are brought to this love and joy—

It is only by faith that we can behold the excellency of Christ—

It is only by faith that we can apply his merits to ourselves—

It is only by faith that we can receive his gracious communications—

Eph. iii. 17.

Repentance will lead to this state; and obedience spring from it—

But it is faith only that will prevail to bring us into it—Rom. xv. 13.

To increase our ardor in pressing forward to this state, let us consider,

III. THE BLESSEDNESS OF THOSE WHO HAVE ATTAINED IT—

The salvation of the soul is the great "end of our faith"—

Present comforts are desirable; but eternal happiness is that which the christian has principally in view—

It is to this that he looks forward, under his first convictions—

This is the end for which he cheerfully endures all his privations and conflicts—

In every possible state he has an eye to this, as the consummation of all his hopes and desires—

This blessed object is already attained by all true christians—

They do not wait for it till they arrive in heaven—

Their full reward indeed is reserved for another world—

But believers have the foretastes of heaven already communicated to them—

Yea, their love to Christ, and their joy in him, are an earnest, as well as pledge, of their eternal inheritance—

INFER,

1. What a rational character is the christian!

He is thought an enthusiast, for loving and rejoicing in Christ—

And they who have no such love or joy appropriate to themselves the name of *rational* christians—

But we are willing to meet our adversaries on this ground, and to submit our sentiments to this test—

If to admire supreme excellence, to love infinite amiableness, and to

* ἀνεκλάττω.

† δὲ δέχομαι.

rejoice in unbounded goodness, be a *rational* employment; yea, if the glorified saints and angels be rational; then the christian is a *rational* character; and the more so, in proportion as he loves and rejoices in Christ: and their adversaries are most *irrational*, in that they can love and rejoice in the things of time and sense, and yet feel no love to, nor any joy in, our adorable Lord and Saviour—

Let those who are now despised as enthusiasts, think who will be accounted *rational* in the day of judgment?

2. How clearly may we know, whether we be real christians, or not!

'There are certainly different degrees of faith, love, and joy—

But every true christian experiences them in some measure—

This is decided by an authority that cannot be doubted—Phil. iii. 3.

Let us then examine what is the supreme object of our affections, and chief source of our joys—

Nor let us ever conclude well of our state, unless we can adopt from our hearts the language of St. Paul—Phil. iii. 8.

3. How highly should we value the ordinances of the gospel!

Faith, as has been shewn, is the mean of filling us with ardent love, and joy unspeakable—

And how is faith to be produced in our hearts, but by the preaching of the gospel?—Rom. x. 14.

Let us then love the ordinances of religion, and diligently attend them—

Let us come to them *with the express view* to have our faith, our love and our joy increased—

And let us judge of our improvement of them by the degree in which we experience these effects from them

EXTENT AND SOURCE OF THE CHRISTIAN'S POWER.

Phil. iv. 13.—I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me. (H. H.)

THERE are in the sacred writings many various, and apparently opposite, representations of the christian's state: he is mournful, yet happy; sinful, yet holy; weak, yet possessed of a derived omnipotence. These paradoxes are incomprehensible to the world at large: but the solution of them is easy to those who know what man is *by nature*, and what he is *by grace*, and what are the effects which flow from the contrary and contending principles of flesh and Spirit. Nothing can be more incredible, at first sight, than the assertion in the former part of our text: but, when qualified and explained by the latter part, it is both credible and certain: yea, it presents to our minds a most encouraging and consoling truth.

In elucidating this passage, we shall shew,

I. THE EXTENT OF A CHRISTIAN'S POWER.

Using only such a latitude of expression as is common in the holy scriptures, we may say concerning every true christian, that he can,

1. Endure all trials.

In following his divine Master, he may be called to suffer reproaches, privations, torments, and death itself. But "none of these can move him." When his heart is right with God, he can "rejoice that he is counted worthy

to suffer shame for his Redeemer's sake:" Acts v. 41; he can "suffer the loss of all things, and yet count them but dung:" Phil. iii. 8; under extreme torture, he can refuse to accept deliverance, in the prospect of "a better resurrection:" Heb. xi. 35; he can say, "I am ready to die for the Lord's sake;" Acts xxi. 13; and when presented at the stake as a sacrifice to be slain, he can look upon his sufferings as a matter of self-congratulation and exceeding joy, Phil. ii. 17, 18; 1 Pet. iv. 12, 13.

2. Mortify all lusts.

Great are his inward corruptions; and many are the temptations to call them forth: but he is enabled to mortify and subdue them. Gal. v. 24. "The lust of the flesh, the lust of the eye, and the pride of life," are very fascinating: but "the grace of God, which has brought salvation to his soul, has taught him to deny them all, and to live righteously, soberly, and godly in this present world." 1 John ii. 15, 16, with Tit. ii. 13, 14. "By the great and precious promises of the gospel, he is made a partaker of the divine nature," 2 Pet. i. 4, and is stirred up to "cleanse himself from all filthiness, both of flesh and spirit, and to perfect holiness in the fear of God." 2 Cor. vii. 1.

3. Fulfill all duties.

Every different situation brings with it some correspondent duties: prosperity demands humility and vigilance; adversity calls for patience and contentment. Now the christian is "like a tree that is planted by the rivers of water, and bringeth forth its fruits *in its season*." Psa. i. 3. It is to this change of circumstances that the apostle more immediately refers in the text: "I have learned," says he, "in whatsoever state I am, therewith to be content. I know both how to be abased, and I know how to abound: everywhere, and in all things, I am instructed both to be full, and to be hungry, both to abound, and to suffer need. *I can do all things*." Ver. 11—13. The christian knows that all his duties are summed up in love to God, and love to man: he is assured, that no changes in his condition can for one moment relax his obligation to approve himself to God in the execution of these duties: and he endeavors to avail himself of every wind that blows, to get forward in his christian course.

But in reference to all the foregoing points, we must acknowledge, that all christians are not equally advanced; nor does any christian so walk as not to shew, at some time or other, that "he has not yet attained, nor is altogether perfect." Phil. iii. 12. We must be understood therefore as having declared, rather what the christian "*can do*," than what he actually does in all instances. "In many things he still offends;" Jam. iii. 2; but he aspires after the full attainment of this proper character: in the performance of his duties, he aims at *universality in the matter, uniformity in the manner, and perfection in the measure* of them.

The christian's power being so extraordinary, we may well inquire after,

II. THE SOURCE FROM WHENCE HE DERIVES IT.

The christian *in himself* is altogether destitute of strength—

If we consult the *scripture representations* of him, we find that he is "without strength," Rom. v. 6, and even "dead in trespasses and sins." Eph. ii. 1. Nor, after he is regenerate, has he any more power that he can call his own; for "in him, that is, in his flesh, dwelleth no good thing." Rom. vii. 15, 18, 19.

If *our Lord's assertion* may be credited, "without him we can do nothing;" we are like branches severed from the vine. John xv. 5.

If the experience of the most eminent apostle will serve as a criterion, he confessed, that he "had not of himself a sufficiency even to think a good thought; his sufficiency was entirely of God." 2 Cor. iii. 5.

His power even to do the smallest good is derived from Christ—

"It has pleased the Father, that in Christ should all fullness dwell," Col. i. 19, and that "out of his fullness all his people should receive." John i. 16. It is he who "strengthens us with all might by his Spirit in the inner man;" Eph. iii. 16; it is he who "gives us both to will and to do." Phil. ii. 13; Heb. xiii. 21. If we are "strong in any degree, it is in the Lord, and in the power of *his* might." Eph. vi. 10. Whatever we do, we must give him the glory of it, saying, "I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me;" Gal. ii. 20; "I have labored; yet not I, but the grace of God which was with me;" "by the grace of God I am, what I am." 1 Cor. xv. 10.

Nor is it by strength *once* communicated, that we are strong; but by continual communications of grace from the same overflowing fountain. It is not through Christ who *hath strengthened*, but who *doth strengthen* us, that we can do all things.* We need fresh life from him, in order to the production of good fruit; exactly as we need fresh light from the sun, in order to a prosecution of the common offices of life. One moment's intermission of either, would instantly produce a suspension of all effective industry.

From that source he receives all that he can stand in need of—

Christ is not so prodigal of his favors, as to confer them in needless profusion: he rather apportions our strength to the occasions that arise to call it forth. Deut. xxxiii. 25. He bids us to renew our applications to him; and, in answer to them, imparts "grace sufficient for us." 2 Cor. xii. 9. There are no limits to his communications: however "wide we open our mouth, he will fill it." Ps. lxxxi. 10. He is "able to make *all* grace abound towards us, that we, having *all-ways* *all-sufficiency* in *all* things, may abound unto *every* good work:" 2 Cor. ix. 8; he is ready to "do for us exceeding abundantly above all that we can ask or think." Eph. iii. 20. "If only we believe, *all* things shall be possible unto us;" Mark ix. 23; we shall be "able to quench *all* the fiery darts of the devil," Eph. vi. 16, and "be more than conquerors over *all* the enemies of our souls." Rom. viii. 37

The uses to which we may apply this subject, are,

1. The conviction of the ignorant.

Many, when urged to devote themselves to God, reply, that we require more of them than they can do; and that it is impossible for them to live according to the scriptures. But what ground can there be for such an objection? Is not Christ ever ready to assist us? Is not omnipotence pledged for our support? Away with your excuses then, which have their foundation in ignorance, and their strength in sloth. Call upon your Saviour; and he will enable you to "stretch forth your withered hand:" at his command, the dead shall arise out of their graves; and the bond-slaves of sin and satan shall be "brought into the liberty of the children of God."

2. The encouragement of the weak.

A life of godliness cannot be maintained without constant watchfulness and strenuous exertion. And there are times when "even the youths faint and are weary, and the young men utterly fall." But "if we wait upon our God we shall certainly renew our strength, and mount up with wings as eagles." Isa. xl. 30, 31. If we look "to Him on whom our help is laid," Ps. lxxxix. 19, the experience of David shall be ours: "In the day when

I cried, thou answeredst me, and strengthenedst me with strength in my soul." *Psa. cxxxviii. 3.* Let not any difficulties then discourage us. "Let the weak say, I am strong;" *Joel iii. 10*; and the stripling go forth with confidence against Goliath. Let us "be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus," *2 Tim. ii. 1*, and "his strength shall assuredly be perfected in our weakness," *2 Cor. xii. 9.*

OUR TIMES IN GOD'S HAND.

Psalm xxxi. 15.—My times are in thy hand. (H. H.)

To the ungodly it is a satisfaction to deny the providence of God, and to cut him off, as it were, from any connection with his creatures. But the saints find a rich consolation in the thought that God reigneth. This it is which reconciles them to the evils they endure, and fortifies them against those which they have reason to apprehend. David, in the psalm before us, complains that there were many who "took counsel together against him, and devised to take away his life." But he comforted himself in the reflection, that, however *man* might be his enemy, *God* was "his God;" and that however bitterly his enemies might be enraged against him, "his times were not in *their* hands, but in *God's*;" and, consequently, that they could do nothing against him but by his permission.

From this view of the text we are led to notice,

I. OUR DEPENDENCE ON GOD.

God is the Governor of the universe: he appoints the stars their courses; he makes the raging elements to fulfill his will, *Ps. cxlviii. 8*; he imposes a restraint upon the most savage beasts, causing them to suppress, *1 Kin. xiii. 28*, or forget, *Dan. vi. 22*, their instinctive ferocity, or over-ruling the exercise of it, for the preservation, *John i. 17*, or destruction of men, *2 Kin. ii. 24*, as he sees occasion. The affairs of men he more especially controls. In his hands are,

1. The occurrences of life

There is nothing really casual or contingent in the world. It is God that disposes of us from our earliest infancy to the latest hour of our lives. "He determines the bounds of our habitation, *Acts xvii. 26*. If we are called to the possession of wealth, or deprived of it by any untoward circumstances, it is "the Lord who gives, and the Lord who taketh it away, *Job i. 21*. If we enjoy health, or pine away in sickness, it is "the Lord who both wounds and heals, who kills and makes alive," *1 Sam. ii. 6, 7*. "There is neither good nor evil in the city, but the Lord is the doer of it," *Am. iii. 6*. Even the falling of a hair of our head, trifling as it is, takes not place but by his appointment, *Matt. x. 30*.

2. The seasons of death.

To every man "there is an appointed time upon earth, *Job vii. 1*: there are "bounds which he cannot pass, *Job xiv. 5*. "God holdeth our souls in life, *Ps. lxvi. 9*: and "when he taketh away our breath, we die, and return to the dust," *Ps. civ. 29*. Youth and health are no security against the stroke of death: the most vigorous constitutions are soon broken, when God is pleased to afflict us, *Job xxi. 23—25*: the skill of physicians, however useful when attended with his blessing, is of no avail, *Mark v. 26*. So

numerous are the occasions of death, that no caution can possibly avoid them: "a man may flee from a lion, and a bear meet him; or he may go into a house for safety, and a serpent bite him," Amos v. 19. When God "requires our souls," we must surrender them at his call," Luke xii. 20. Our days are protracted to an advanced age, if he be pleased to uphold us; if not, our course is finished as soon as ever it is commenced. It is "in God, and in God alone, that we live, and move, and have our being," Acts xvii. 28.

But though these ideas are certainly comprehended in the text, its more immediate scope is to declare,

II. OUR SECURITY IN GOD.

We have already observed, that the words of the text were introduced by David as a consolatory reflection, under the cruel treatment which he had received from friends and enemies. We are therefore taught by them to assure ourselves,

1. That none can destroy us before our time.

We appear to be, yea, we really are, in the midst of many and great dangers. But however we may be encompassed with enemies, they cannot prevail against us till the Lord's time for our removal is come. David was continually exposed to the rage and jealousy of Saul, who repeatedly cast a javelin at him, and hunted him incessantly with armed hosts "like a partridge upon the mountains." Yet though he was often in the most imminent danger, 1 Sam. xxiii. 26, and certainly would have been betrayed by the men of Keilah, ib. ver. 11, 12, yet God watched over him, and kept him in perfect safety. Many sought to apprehend our Lord; but "they could not lay hands on him till his hour was come," John vii. 30. & viii. 20; Luke xiii. 33; and even then Pilate "could have had no power against him, unless it had been given him from above," John xix. 11. Paul was in perils innumerable, "and in deaths oft," 2 Cor. xi. 23—27: once he was stoned, and even left for dead, Acts xiv. 19, 20; but none could take away his life, till he had finished the course marked out for him. Thus we also are immortal, till our work is done. We are surrounded with "chariots of fire and horses of fire," 2 Kin. vi. 17: yea, "God himself is a wall of fire round about us," Zech. ii. 5. And sooner shall successive bands of enemies be struck dead upon the spot by fire from heaven, 2 Kin. i. 10—12, than one of the Lord's little ones shall perish, Matt. xviii. 14.

2. That none shall hurt us without his permission.

As we depend on God for our happiness as well as for our existence, so are both our being and our well-being secured by him. Satan could not touch the person or the property of Job, till he had obtained leave of God to do so, Job i. 12, & ii. 6. "Nor can any weapon that is formed against us, prosper," Isa. liv. 17, any further than our God shall see good to permit it. "His angels encamp round about us," Ps. xxxiv. 7, and have an especial charge to "keep us in all our ways, that we dash not our foot against a stone," Ps. xci. 11, 12. "Neither the arrow that flieth by day, nor the pestilence that walketh in darkness, can hurt us. Thousands may fall at our side, and ten thousands at our right hand; but it shall not come nigh us," ib. ver. 5—7.

We are not indeed at liberty to rush needlessly into danger, from an expectation that God will deliver us; (this were to "tempt the Lord our God,") Matt. iv. 6, 7; but in the path of duty we have nothing to fear: we may "tread upon the lion, the adder, or the dragon;" Ps. xci. 13; Acts xxviii. 3—6: we may drink poison itself, Mark xvi. 18, or suffer ourselves to be

committed to the flames, without experiencing the smallest injury, Dan. iii. 25—27: nothing in the whole universe can “harm us, if we be followers of that which is good,” 1 Pet. iii. 13: if God see fit to keep us, we are as safe “in a den of lions” as in a house of friends.

From this subject we may *learn*,

1. To seek God without delay.

There is no period of life when we can call one day, or one hour, our own. We are altogether “in God’s hands;” and, if he withdraw his support for one moment, we perish, as certainly as a stone gravitates to the earth. Shall we then, when so entirely dependent on our God, provoke him to cast us out of his hands? Shall we continue to despise his patience and forbearance, till he swear in his wrath that our “time shall be no longer?” Rev. x. 6. Think, how many have lost the time afforded them, and how bitterly they now bewail their folly: and beg of God, that he would “so teach you to number your days, that you may apply your hearts unto wisdom.” Ps. xc. 12.

2. To serve him without fear—

We are too apt to keep back from serving God through fear of the persecutions we may endure from man. But, if our times be in God’s hands, all our concerns must be there too; and nothing can befall us but by his appointment. “Who art thou then, that thou shouldst be afraid of a man that shall die, and forgettest the Lord thy Maker?” Isa. li. 12, 13. Are we not told, that “the wrath of man shall praise him; and that the remainder of it he shall restrain?” Ps. lxxvi. 10. Be bold then for God; “set your face as a flint against the whole world,” Isa. xlix. 7—9, and trust in him for protection. He will not indeed screen you from all trials; because it is on many accounts necessary that you should feel them, 1 Pet. i. 6: but he will suffer none to come upon you which he will not enable you to bear, none which he will not sanctify to your eternal good, 1 Cor. x. 13

3. To trust him without carefulness.

It is foolish as well as impious to distrust God, or to murmur at any of his dispensations. In whose hands could the disposal of all events be placed so much to our advantage, as in ‘his, who possesses infinite wisdom to devise what is best, and infinite power to effect it? Would we be made the sport of chance or fortune? or would we have our present and everlasting concerns left wholly to our own management? If we are not fit to regulate our temporal affairs till we attain the age of manhood, how much less can we ever be competent to take the reins of God’s government into our own hands, and to order the affairs of his kingdom. But our times will be in God’s hands, whether we acquiesce in it or not. Let us therefore contentedly leave ourselves to his all-wise disposal, assured, that “he doeth all things well,” and will make “all things to work together for good to them that love him.”

THE SECURITY OF THOSE WHO DWELL IN GOD.

Psalm xci. 9, 10.—Because thou hast made the Lord, which is my refuge, even the Most High, thy habitation, there shall no evil befall thee. (H. H.)

It is scarcely possible to conceive any terms more strong, or any images more lively, than those in which the scripture represents the privileges of

believers. We need look no further than to the psalm before us for a confirmation of this truth. Indeed, according to the view given of this psalm by a learned Prelate, there is, in the first verses of it, an emphasis which cannot be surpassed.* And the whole may be considered as the believer's charter, in which all his privileges are contained, from his first acceptance with God to the consummation of his happiness in glory.

We have in the words of our text a just description of the believer :

I. HIS EXPERIENCE.

The true christian is one who has been "turned from darkness unto light, and from the power of satan unto God." Being once brought to God, he "makes the Most High his habitation." He regards God, not merely as reconciled to him, but as affording him what a dwelling-house affords to its possessor,

1. Free access.

A person goes familiarly to his house at all times, not doubting but that he shall gain a ready admission into it. He considers it as his own, and feels that it exists only for his accommodation. It is thus that the believer goes to God as his God: he has "access to him with boldness and confidence:" he is certain that, when he calls, he shall receive an answer; and "when he knocks, the door will be opened to him." In this precise view the Psalmist speaks of God; "be thou my strong habitation, whereunto I may continually resort." Ps. lxxi. 3.

2. Necessary provision.

Every man, whatever be his situation in life, expects to find in his own house the things suited to his necessities. He does not seek his meals at the houses of his neighbors, but in his own; and he returns home at stated seasons to partake of them. And whither does the believer go for daily supplies of bread for his soul? It is in Christ Jesus that his fullness is treasured up, and in him the believer expects to find the "grace that is sufficient for him." God invites him to come to him for the express purpose, that he may be filled and satisfied with good things: "Wherefore do ye spend your money for that which is not bread? Hearken diligently unto me, and eat ye that which is good, and let your soul delight itself in fatness." Isai. lv. 2.

3. Sure protection.

If storms descend, or dangers menace, we take refuge in our house, and find it a place of safety. Thus "the name of God also is a strong tower, to which the righteous runneth and is safe." Prov. xviii. 10. It is to himself that God invites us, when he says, "Come my people, enter thou into thy chambers, shut the door about thee, and hide thyself for a little moment, until the indignation be overpast." Isai. xxvi. 20. And that this was a primary idea in the mind of the Psalmist, appears from the very words of the text, wherein he calls God "his refuge," and from the whole scope of the psalm, from the beginning to the end. With this also agrees the beautiful description given of Jesus by the prophet, as "an hiding-place from the wind, and a covert from the tempest." Isai. xxxii. 2.

4. Sweet repose.

To this house a man retires from the noise and bustle of the world; and there he lays himself down to rest after the fatigues of the day. Home, though inferior in many respects to places of temporary residence, is to all

* Bishop Horne reads the two first verses thus: "He that dwelleth &c. *who abideth* under &c. *who saith* of the Lord," &c. Then at the end of ver. 2, he supposes the Psalmist to break off abruptly, and, instead of continuing his description, to address himself to the person before described; "Surely he shall deliver thee."

most all persons the most agreeable, because there they are most at ease. And such is God to the believer. "In every place, God is to him as a little sanctuary," Ezek. xi. 16; where he finds himself at rest. He carries his wants to God, and "casts all his care on him," and enjoys peace which passeth all understanding. In this sense he says *for his own encouragement*, "Return unto thy rest, O my soul:" and attests *for the glory of his God*, "Lord thou hast been our dwelling-place in all generations." Ps. xc. i.

In connexion with this experience of the believer, let us consider,

II. HIS PRIVILEGE.

The expression in the text seems to exceed the bounds of truth: but the more it is examined, the more will it be found to be strictly true. The man who makes God his habitation shall have no evil befall him:

1. None here.

No *casual* evil shall befall him. There is no such thing as chance: every thing, even to the falling of a sparrow, is ordered of the Lord. As for the children of God, "their heavenly Father hath given his angels charge over them, to keep them in all their ways;" see ver. 11, 12; and if any thing were to happen to them, *they* (the angels) would contract a fearful responsibility for their neglect. We must not however imagine that believers are at liberty to rush into needless dangers; for our Lord, when tempted by satan to cast himself from a pinnacle of the temple in expectation that the angels would preserve him from injury, replied, "Thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God:" but nothing can happen to them except by the divine appointment: they are hid in the shadow of their Father's hand, and "their very hairs are all numbered."

But it may be thought that *penal* evil may come to them. This however we utterly deny. That they may be "visited with the rod," we readily acknowledge: but there is great difference between the vindictive arm of an incensed judge, and the gentle chastisements of an indulgent parent. The cup that may at any time be put into their hands may be bitter; but it has not in it one drop of wrath: it is altogether mixed by love; and not an ingredient can be found in it, which they themselves shall not one day confess to have been salutary and beneficial.

In short, no *real* evil shall befall them. That they may have troubles, is certain: that their troubles may be heavy and accumulated, is also certain. But who accounts even the amputation of a limb *evil*, if it be the only and infallible method of preserving life? Much less then are any sufferings to be accounted evil, which the believer can ever be called to sustain: for he shall never endure any, which shall not work for good to him in this life, and be the means of increasing his weight of glory in the next. Rom. viii. 28, and 2 Cor. iv. 17.

2. None hereafter.

It is in this life only that the believer can meet with even the semblance of evil: when he goes hence, he is instantly placed beyond the reach of harm. No sin, no sorrow, no pain, no temptation, no weariness, no want, can ever be felt by him in the mansions of bliss. He will there enjoy for ever one unclouded day; and his happiness will be without alloy, without intermission, without end. Rev. xxi. 4.

To render this subject more instructive, we shall add a word,

1. Of direction.

Christ, in reference to the sheepfold of his church, says, "I am the door; if any man enter in by me, he shall be saved, and shall go in and out, and find pasture." John x. 9. The same figure we may apply to the

subject before us: "Christ is the door;" he is "the way to the Father;" and "no man cometh unto the Father, but by him." To those who come to God in any other way, he is not "a refuge," or "habitation," but "a consuming fire." Heb. xii. 29. But if we believe in Christ, then "will he dwell in us, and we shall dwell in him:" John vi. 56; yea, "he will be our house of defence, to save us for ever." Ps. xxxi. 2.

2. Of warning.

Who, except the believer, can apply to himself the promise in the text? As for the unbelieving and disobedient, they are in danger every hour: they know not but that God's wrath may break forth against them the very next moment to their destruction. Of this they are certain, (whether they will believe it or not,) that in a little time his judgments shall overtake them, and the greatest of all evils shall befall them, unless they repent. O that they would be prevailed upon to flee for refuge to the hope that is set before them! O that they would now seek to be "found in Christ!" Then should the destroying angel pass over them, and "they should dwell safely, and be quiet from the fear of evil." Prov. i. 33.

3. Of encouragement.

The weakness of men's faith often robs them of the comfort which it is their privilege to enjoy. Why should a believer be afraid of thunder and lightning? Were he but sensible what a protector he has, he would feel assured that no evil could come unto him. How varied are God's promises to him in the psalm before us! How diversified also are the assurances given him by Eliphaz in the book of Job! Job v. 19—24. Let him only commit himself to God, and he has nothing to fear. Let us then, beloved, have faith in God; and let those words of David be our song in this land of our pilgrimage; "God is our refuge, &c.; therefore will we not fear, though the earth be removed, and though the waters be carried into the midst of the sea: &c." Ps. xlv. 1—4.

THE TRIUMPHANT SONG OF THE REDEEMED.

Rev. i. 5, 6.—And from Jesus Christ, who is the faithful witness, and the first begotten of the death, and the prince of the kings of the earth. Unto him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood, and hath made us kings and priests unto God and his Father; to him be glory and dominion for ever and ever. Amen.

THE Saviour having appeared in a vision to St. John, in "the isle of Patmos," he commanded him to write appropriate epistles to "the seven churches in Asia," to reprove their evils, correct their errors, and encourage their hopes. He therefore introduced the subjects of his addresses by an affectionate salutation in the name of the triune Jehovah; and having distinctly specified the Father and the Holy Spirit, he solemnly adds in the text, "and from Jesus Christ, who is the faithful witness," &c. These words strikingly illustrate the *mediatorial character* of Jesus Christ—the *exalted privilege* of his believing people—and the *personal influence* of redeeming grace. Let us observe,

I. THE MEDIATORIAL CHARACTER OF JESUS CHRIST. This is admirably described by the apostle, in the words before us; in which he faithfully re

presents the various offices that he executes, as the mediator of the new covenant.

1. *He is the prophet of his church.* Hence he is denominated, "*the faithful witness.*" A *witness* is one who either *reveals* what was previously unknown, or *attests* what has been already announced. In both these respects Jesus Christ is "given to be a witness to the people." He has distinctly revealed the true character and will of God—the astonishing scheme and work of redemption—and the only way of salvation and eternal life, John iii. 16—18. The writings of Moses and the prophets were fully accomplished in him, for they "testified beforehand the sufferings of Christ, and the glory that should follow." The comparative darkness of the law is passed away, and the meridian light of the gospel now shineth. The sun of righteousness hath arisen on the moral world, to give light to them that sit in darkness and the shadow of death. As a teacher come from God, he "spake as never man spake;" and as an immutable witness, he still eternally reveals and personally attests divine truth, both by the medium of his word, and the influence of his spirit, Rom. viii. 14—16; 2 Tim. iii. 16, 17. The testimony of Christ is invariably true, for he is the *faithful witness*, whose veracity is infinite, and fidelity infallible. He has brought life and immortality to light by the gospel; he guides his people into all truth, and makes them wise unto salvation, Isa. liv. 14.

2. *He is the high priest of our profession.* This is evidently intended, when he is called, "the first begotten of the dead." His death and resurrection were important parts of his priesthood, and essentially connected with the salvation of sinners. An atonement was absolutely necessary, and therefore Jesus Christ in matchless love, "took upon him the seed of Abraham, to make reconciliation for the sins of the people." By his *sacrificial death*, he fully atoned for our iniquities, and opened a new and living way to the Father, Heb. x. 18—22. He also rose again for our justification, and is now "the resurrection and the life, having obtained eternal redemption for us." He is therefore emphatically, "the first begotten of the dead," because he is the first, who ever rose to die no more; and his resurrection clearly demonstrates the efficacy of his sacrifice, and is the strongest pledge of the blissful immortality which awaits his people in the world to come, Luke xxiv. 46, 47; 1 Cor. xv. 20. As the high priest over the house of God, Christ is our "advocate with the Father," and the altar which sanctifieth both the giver and the gift. Through him alone we have access to the throne of grace; and our persons and services are accepted by virtue of the life and death of him, who once suffered for our sins, and now "ever liveth to make intercession for us," John xiv. 6; Heb. iv. 14—16.

3. *He is the sovereign of the universe.* His dominion is supreme and unlimited, reaching through all space, and extending to all duration. He is therefore justly acknowledged "the prince of the kings of the earth;" for by him "kings reign, and princes decree justice." An *essential* God, his kingdom ruleth over all things, and he *only* sways the sceptre of universal empire, and sustains supremacy of character, as "the king of kings, and Lord of lords." And as "the mediator between God and man," he has founded a kingdom of grace, in which he triumphantly reigns for the salvation of mankind, Dan. ii. 44; Matt. iii. 2. This kingdom is spiritual in its character, and perpetual in its duration. All other empires are worldly and perishing; but the kingdom of Christ "is not of this world, and shall never be destroyed." The Almighty King of Zion reigns *universally* in the world—*mediatorially* in his church—*spiritually* in the hearts of his

people—and *eternally* in the glory of heaven, Heb. i. 8; Rom. xiv. 17; Matt. xxv. 34. His reign is infinitely wise, holy, just, merciful, and gracious. What a transcendently glorious and amiable Sovereign! Let us therefore consider.

II. THE EXALTED PRIVILEGE OF HIS BELIEVING PEOPLE;—"Unto him that loved us," &c. This inspired description of the nature and properties of Christian salvation, is highly appropriate and comprehensive; and distinctly specifies,

1. *The divinity of its origin*;—"Unto him that loved us." God is unquestionably the source of all possible good, and from him every blessing descends. When he beheld the miserable and perishing state of mankind, he remembered us in infinite mercy, and graciously sent his Son to be the Saviour of the world, John iv. 9, 10. Jesus also loved us, and "gave himself a ransom for all, to be testified in due time." What unspeakable love has he manifested to fallen sinners! Consider his amazing incarnation, sufferings, crucifixion, resurrection, ascension, and intercession at the "right hand of the majesty on high," 2 Cor. v. 14, 15, viii. 9. His love contains unfathomable breadths, and lengths, and depths, and heights, which neither angels nor men can perfectly comprehend! This spontaneous and unparalleled love is the originating cause of all the ineffable blessings of present and eternal salvation, Eph. ii. 4—6.

2. *The excellency of its character*;—"And washed us from our sins." All sin is moral contamination. It not only contracts guilt, but also defiles every power both of body and soul. Hence it is called, "uncleanness, corruption, defilement, the pollution of the world, and filthiness of flesh and spirit," Mark vii. 21—23. From these stains of guilt and depravity Christ saves all his faithful followers. The work of grace is *already begun* in their hearts. Their iniquities are freely and fully forgiven, and they believingly participate the cleansing efficacy of the blood of sprinkling, 1 John i. 7. Present salvation therefore includes both the justification of our *persons*, through the righteousness of Christ, and the sanctification of our *nature* by the spirit of holiness, Jer. xxiii. 6; Titus iii. 5. Pardon and purity are *equally* necessary, and are *actually* enjoyed by those who have "tasted that the Lord is gracious," and are saved "by the washing of regeneration, and the renewing of the Holy Ghost," 1 Cor. vi. 11; Tit. ii. 14.

3. *The efficacy of its medium*;—"And washed us in his own blood." This is the only possible way in which sinners can be saved; "for without shedding of blood, there can be no remission." Every spiritual blessing is attributed to the blood of Christ. We are *redeemed, justified, adopted, washed*, and ultimately *glorified*, through "the blood of the everlasting covenant," Rom. iii. 24, 25; 1 Pet. i. 19; Rev. vii. 14. This medium of salvation was *typified* by the whole sacrificial dispensation of the Jews, which was a shadow of good things to come. But Jesus Christ has now *personally* "opened a fountain for sin and uncleanness," and saves his people not *ceremonially* by the blood of legal sacrifices, but *meritoriously* by his own "most precious blood," which was shed for them, Heb. xii. 14. This blood possesses not only an *atoning virtue*, for the expiation of sin, but also, a *cleansing efficacy*, which purifies the soul; for "the blood of Jesus Christ cleanseth from all unrighteousness."

4. *The dignity of its subjects*;—"And hath made us *kings* and *priests* unto God and his Father." Divine grace both saves and dignifies its possessors; it raises them from the ruin and misery of sin, to a state of glory and virtue. They are anointed spiritual *kings*, having already received a

kingdom of grace: and are the legitimate heirs of the kingdom of heaven, Col. i. 13; Heb. xii. 28. They are also consecrated *priests*, "to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God through Jesus Christ." They receive this honor that cometh from God only, and participate all the inestimable dignities and privileges of the glorious gospel of peace, 1 Pet. ii. 9, 10. The believing recipients of salvation, are thus divinely honored and blessed; and are made by the blood and Spirit of Christ, "a royal and holy priesthood unto God and his Father." Surely, "happy art thou, O Israel; who is like unto thee, O people saved by the Lord!" This will lead us to notice,

III. THE PERSONAL INFLUENCE OF REDEEMING GRACE:—"To him by glory and dominion for ever and ever. Amen." This lively description of supreme majesty and power to the redeemer, may be regarded as,

1. *The language of admiration and love.* The believer discovers inexpressible perfection and glory, in the person and character of the Saviour; and therefore regards him, as the object of his intense desire and devout attachment. A *personal* apprehension of his infinite grandeur and goodness deeply affects the minds of Christians, and fills them with unutterable raptures of wonder, love and joy. The believing contemplation of his divine glories, redeeming works, and saving offices, powerfully attracts and captivates their hearts, and triumphantly subdues them to the sceptre of his kingdom. They gladly embrace him as an object altogether lovely and glorious; readily acknowledge the supremacy of his glory and dominion; and joyfully "count all things but loss, for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus the Lord," Gal. vi. 14; 1 John iv. 19.

2. *The language of gratitude and praise.* A participation of the unsearchable riches of Christ is invariably accompanied with grateful and affectionate dispositions of the heart. The doctrine of salvation by grace necessarily excludes boasting, and inspires the profoundest gratitude and thanksgiving. Though the obligations of believers to the redeemer are infinite and indescribable, they sensibly feel their overwhelming influence, and often gratefully exclaim, "bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits;" "unto him that loved us," &c. Their unfeigned gratitude is *practically* displayed, by their love to the Saviour's person,—obedience to his word,—zeal in his cause,—praise for his goodness,—and joyful anticipation of his kingdom, Ps. cxvi. 12—14; 1 Pet. i. 8, 9.

3. *The language of adoration and delight.* Jesus Christ is inexpressibly glorious and precious to them that believe. He is their "wisdom, righteousness and sanctification, and redemption." He is the object of their confidence,—the author of their salvation,—and the source of their happiness; they exultingly glory in his cross,—devoutly honor him as they honor the Father,—supremely adore the perfections of his character,—and greatly delight in the exercises of his worship, Prov. iii. 17; Phil. iii. 3. The text is their triumphant felicity and song in the house of their pilgrimage; and will ultimately constitute the blissful theme of their ceaseless hallelujahs, in the "house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens." Let all the redeemed therefore, believingly and piously add, *Amen*.

This subject displays the exalted dignity of the redeemer,—unfolds the nature and method of salvation,—and affords ample consolation to them, that "follow the Lamb whithersoever he goeth."

CHRIST THE BELIEVER'S LIFE, AND DEATH THE BELIEVER'S GAIN.

Philippians i. 21.—For me to live is Christ, and to die is gain. (Sk.)

WHEN St. Paul uttered this sentiment, he was a prisoner for Jesus Christ, deprived of his liberty, and under the control of his persecuting foes; but his soul was not bound: the Philippians were inexpressibly dear to him; he had them in his heart; they were his joy and his crown; and he longed after them all in the bowels of Jesus Christ: and their love to him, if less ardent, was not less sincere. Hearing of his deprivations, they voluntarily raised a contribution among themselves, and sent it to him by the hand of Epaphroditus their minister; in return, St. Paul sent them this admirable epistle. In the preceding verses to the text, he assures them that the things which had happened to him, were so far from impeding the progress of truth, that they had “fallen out,” &c., ver. 12; and that his fellow helpers in the ministry were more confident by his bonds, ver. 14. He then, after expressing his confidence that all his sufferings would have a favorable issue, verse 19, 20, utters the devout and elevated sentiment in the text; “For me to live,” &c. We have here two things:—

I. CHRIST THE BELIEVER'S LIFE.

II. DEATH THE BELIEVER'S GAIN.

“For me to live is Christ.” This is in effect saying,

1. *Christ is the Author of my life.* ‘Two kinds of life has double-natured man.’ We all live as animal and rational beings, and have capacities for the performance of animal and rational actions. But believers live in a more exalted sense, and possess a higher life, a life of which Jesus Christ is the immediate Author. Once they were devoid of this, and even dead while they lived; they saw objects, heard sounds, tasted food, performed actions, and did all that was necessary as members of civil society and citizens of the world; but they had no spiritual senses, they saw not God, they heard not his voice, they tasted not his love, and they had no feeling of the powers of the world to come. But when they were dead in sin, Christ quickened them. “The hour is coming,” &c., John v. 25. “I am the resurrection and the life,” &c., xi. 25.

2. *Christ is the principle of my life.* Every kind of life, whether vegetable, animal, or spiritual, depends upon some principle from which it springs; for life is but the effects of some latent and operative cause. Christ not only lights up the lamp of spiritual life, but he feeds the flame, and supplies the oil by which it burns. Christ, dwelling in our hearts by faith, becomes the principle of our life. “I am the living bread,” &c., John vi. 51. “Except ye eat the flesh,” &c., ver. 53. “I live, yet not I, but Christ liveth in me,” Gal. ii. 20. “When Christ, who is our life,” &c., Col. iii. 4. “He that hath the Son,” &c., 1 John v. 12. We are as much dependant on Christ for spiritual life, as plants are dependant on the earth for vegetable life, or the body is dependant on the soul for animal life.

3. *Christ is the model of my life.* Christians are not lawless beings who walk at random, or live according to the course of the world. No, they regard Christ as their pattern, and they study to be like him. They do this, because they know that the life of Christ was the most dignified and glorious life that was ever led upon earth, and that there is every thing great and good in the imitation of so illustrious a character.—Because the Spirit of Christ within them, excites them to follow the example of Christ without.—Because they love Christ, and love leads them to imitate the beloved object,—and they

know that the profession of christianity lays them under strong obligations to follow the Lord Jesus. "He that saith he abideth in him, ought himself also," &c., 1 John ii. 6.

4. *Christ is the end of my life.* Carnal men are most commonly selfish men; they seek their own, and not another's wealth; their own ease, or their own glory, or their own pleasure, engages all their attention, and occupies all their time; and they live as fully to themselves, as if they were the authors of their own being, or the arbiters of their own fate. But believers consider Christ as the end of their life; from a consciousness that they owe their being to Christ, and that he formed them for his glory, and redeemed them by his blood: they surrender themselves to his service; whether they eat or drink, or whatever they do, the glory of Christ is their great object: they renounce their own ease, to sustain the cross of Christ: they sacrifice their own reputation for the reproach of Christ: and count not their lives dear unto themselves, so that they may advance the honor of Christ: with the apostle they can say, "None of us liveth unto himself," &c., Rom. xiv. 7, 8.

II. DEATH IS THE BELIEVER'S GAIN. "To die is gain." We must distinguish here, between the act of dying and the consequences of death. There is every thing in death, considered in itself, that is appalling and dreadful. *Look at death in its deprivations.* Here the tenderest bonds of affection are dissolved; the most endearing relations ended; and the deepest pangs of parting endured. *Death in its agonies.* How inadequate is human language to describe the pains of the dying; what deep waters go over them! how hard the struggle they endure! *Death in its degradations.* What can be more exquisitely beautiful than a human body adorned with youth, flushed with health, and fired with vigor, the eyes sparkling with joy, the heart dancing with gladness, the pulse beating high with expectation, and the cheeks glowing lovelier than the virgin rose. But in death all is changed! all degraded! a putrid mass of inanimate matter is all that is left; a receptacle for worms, a prey for corruption, a heap of dust! So that if there were nothing beyond death, it would be no gain to die; for death in itself is a sore evil, and a most terrible curse inflicted upon mankind. But as it is gain to die, pronounced so by an inspired apostle, we must infer that there is another state of being to which death introduces us. In illustrating this subject, we consider the evils from which we are delivered,—and the blessings with which we shall be crowned.

First, The evils from which we are delivered.

1. *Death delivers us from the pains and miseries of the present life.* Man is born to trouble, and suffering is his lot upon earth. He suffers in his body; what numerous ills life is heir to! He suffers in his mind; how many things would his spirit and put him to grief! He suffers by commiseration; his friends and fellow creatures suffer, and he weeps with those that weep. What a suffering man was St. Paul! Hear his tale of woe: "Of the Jews, five times received I forty stripes save one," &c., 2 Cor. xi. 24. Nor was this all, he was a man of feeling; "Who is weak, and I am not weak? who is offended, and I burn not?" "What mean ye, to weep, and break my heart?" Acts xxi. 13. But in heaven there is no pain; "sorrow and sighing shall flee away, and God shall wipe away all tears from our eyes."

2. *Death frees us from all the imperfections of our mortal state.* Our knowledge here is very imperfect and defective; we know but in part: and the little knowledge of which we are possessed is frequently obtained by hard study and intense thought; and this defective knowledge renders us liable to

mistake, to entertain wrong opinions of men and things; and a mistake in judgment frequently induces errors in practice. Paul withstood Peter to the face, because he was to be blamed. But to die is gain. "In heaven we shall know even also as we are known." "There knowledge grows without decay." That is the region of perfection, and there error can find no entrance.

3. *Death terminates the conflicts of our christian warfare.* Believers are now engaged in a most perilous contest. Their enemies are principalities and powers, &c., Eph. vi. 12. The issue of this conflict sometimes appears doubtful; "without are fightings and within are fears:" but when death comes, the fight is finished, the victory won, and the believer goes to his vast reward that awaits him in the skies.

Secondly, The gain to which the text refers, comprehends the acquisition of all possible good.

1. *It will be universal.* In the situation; we exchange houses of clay for everlasting habitations. The society; we leave behind our weeping companions, to greet the blood besprinkled bands on the eternal shore. The enjoyments; here the purest pleasures are often interrupted, and may be finally forfeited. There our enjoyments will flow on like a river, pure as the source from whence they spring. In our capacities; here we have blessings, but sometimes cannot enjoy them; there the body will be immortal, and the soul capacitated for enjoyments the most elevated and enlarged. In employments; the occupations of this world are sordid and laborious; there we shall sing the praises of God, contemplate the mysteries of his nature, the variety of his works, and the glory of his government.

2. *It will be incalculable.* There is no gain upon earth that may not be estimated. We have figures and numbers, and arithmeticians who can form estimates and make calculations to any amount. But who can calculate the value of heavenly joys! the worth of immortal pleasures!

3. *It will be eternal.* It is not the gain of a moment, or even an age, but the gain of eternity, and of all eternity can give. Gain that can never be forfeited, nor diminished in value. Earthly goods cease to give their possessors pleasure, in proportion to the duration of the period they possess them. Worldly joys cloy the appetite, and pleasures cease to please; but the happiness of heaven will increase in value to eternity.

In conclusion we observe,

First, *If Christ is the believer's life, how happy and desirable is his state!* 'What hath the world to equal this?' What life is so honorable, so profitable, and so glorious! How strange it is that we have so few candidates for such a life! Is this your life? Why should not the apostle's experience be yours? There is no state of christianity that belonged exclusively to any order of men. You may be as holy as apostles. If Christ is not your life, you are not christians; you may have been baptized into the christian name, and accustomed to attend christian ordinances; but in the benefits of christianity you have no share, and to the rewards of christianity you have no title. O what a miserable, worldly, sensual life is yours!

Secondly, *If death is the believer's gain, should not this more than reconcile us to the thoughts of dying?* Many look at death in the pains and agonies it inflicts, and tremble with fearful apprehensions. These we may never realize; many die as tranquilly as they sink into the arms of sleep: but should death be even as dreadful as we anticipate, 'tis useless 'to die a thousand deaths in fearing one.' Let us look at the promises of God, read

the experience of dying saints, and especially "endure as seeing him who is invisible."

Thirdly, *If to die is gain, how selfish to indulge inconsolable grief for our departed friends, who have passed into the skies.* "O the pain, the bliss of dying!" the bitterness of death is with them for ever passed, and the bliss of now dying is their unalienable portion.

THE HAPPINESS OF DYING IN THE LORD.

Revelation xiv. 13 —And I heard a voice from heaven, saying unto me, Write, Blessed are the dead, &c. (H)

THESE words are a voice from heaven, concerning the future state of those that die in Christ; and surely none are better qualified to comfort those who are left behind, than one of the heavenly company.

Our blessed Lord tells his disciples, when sinking into despondency at the idea of his leaving them, "If ye loved me, ye would rejoice, because I said, I go unto my Father," John xiv. 28; so when the believer dies, he goes to be with him: and, that we may not sorrow as those who have no hope, the text tells us, that they are not lost by ceasing to live in this world, but, are advanced to an infinitely better life than this: "Blessed are the dead," &c.

Consider,

I. WHAT IT IS TO DIE IN THE LORD, AND WHO MAY BE SAID TO DO SO.

This may be said of the martyrs who die for the Lord, and seal the truth of their profession with their blood. It is applicable also to all real christians, who are united to Christ, and die the members of his mystical body: these die in the Lord. And, in order to this,

Something is previously necessary.

1. That they be quickened and made alive by the Lord John v. 20, 21; Eph. ii. 1.

2. That they be pardoned, justified, and sanctified. 1 Cor. vi. 11.

3. That they walk after him. Heb. xii. 2; 1 Pet. ii. 21.

4. That they live to him, as they receive all from him. 2 Cor. v. 14, 15; Phil. i. 21.

Something is implied.

1. That we die in submission to his will, when, where, and how he pleases. Rom. xiv. 7, 8.

2. In dependence upon him for life and immortality.

3. A sincere desire to be with him. Phil. i. 23.

II. WHEREIN THEIR BLESSEDNESS CONSISTS; and the text tells us, that, "They rest from their labors."

1. Arising from the evils to which they were subject in this world: disease, pain, want, &c. "Many are the afflictions," &c. Ps. xxxiv. 19. All shall be left behind at death. Rev. xxi. 4.

2. From satan's temptations. After death they shall be placed beyond the reach of his fiery darts. 2 Cor. iv. 4. These they shall have left in the field of battle, and be "where the weary are at rest." 1 Pet. v. 8 Job iii. 17.

3. From the persecution of the ungodly. John xv. 20.

4. From the remains of the carnal mind, wanderings in duty, and the imperfections of the best of our religious services.

“Their works follow them.”

All the works they have done for God and his Christ, to advance his glory, prepare themselves for his kingdom, and serve his interest. and to help on others to it. These works shall follow after, so as to enter with them, and that in the most endearing manner.

1. In God's faithful remembrance of them all. Heb. vi. 10; Mal. iii. 16.

2. In the recompense of reward, which God will bestow. 1 Cor. xv. 58.

III. WHY THIS MESSAGE IS SO SOLEMNLY PROCLAIMED BY “A VOICE FROM HEAVEN.”

1. To let an unthinking world know what becomes of the friends of Christ when they die.

2. To assure believers that death is no hinderance to their happiness; but the certain, though awful, way to it.

3. To leave it on record, to the end of time, for the assurance of every christian, that their rest is not here, and to excite them to look after one remaining.

APPLICATION.

1. Are the dead, who die in the Lord, blessed? how miserable are they who die out of him: and if the former are blessed immediately, henceforth from the time they die, so the latter must be wretched immediately upon their dying.

2. How much better to a believer is the day of his death, than the day of his birth; seeing he is born to labor, but dies to rest!

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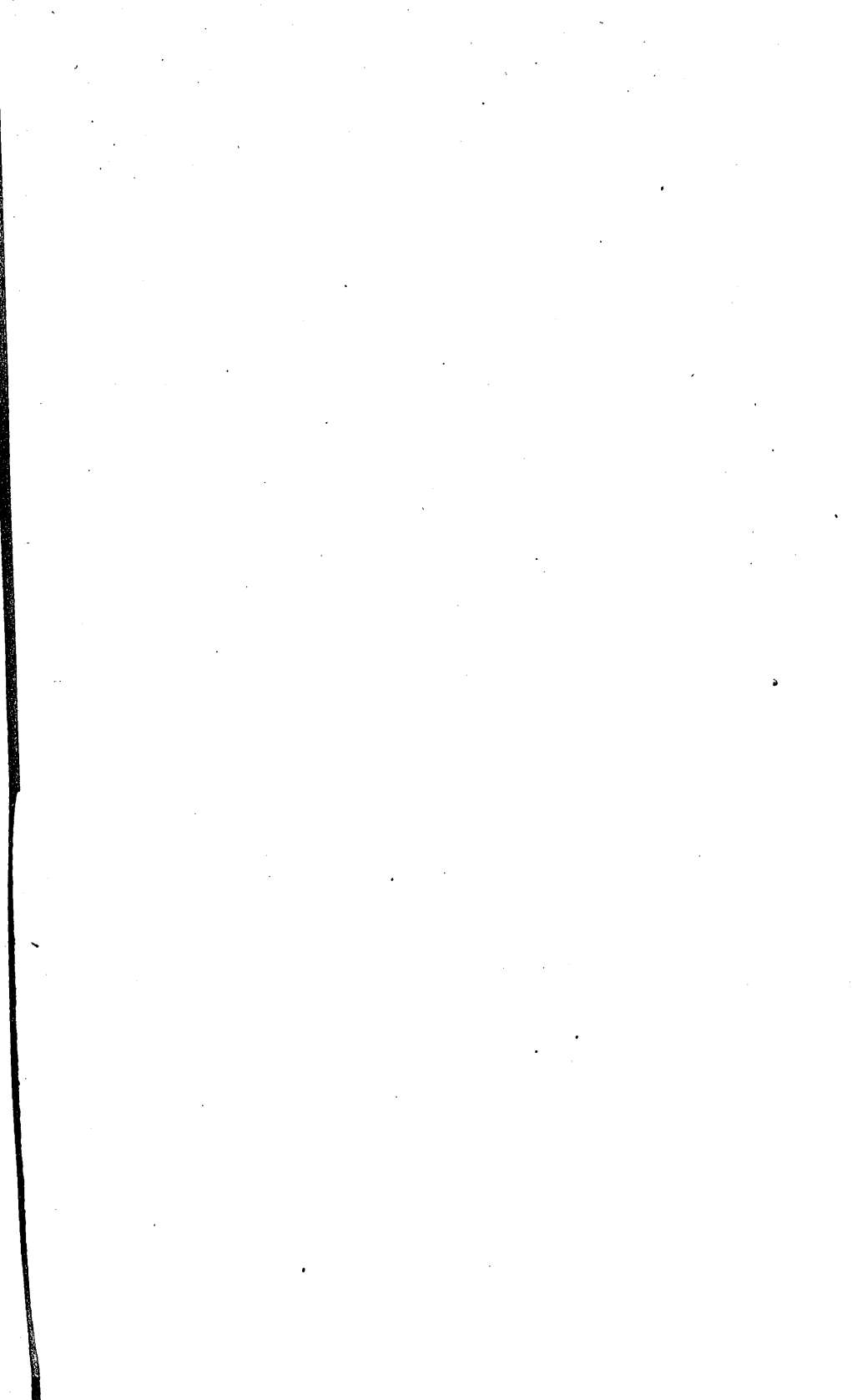
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